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Press Release

River Kennet faces new threat from disposable vapes



Photo credit: ARK 2023

Action for the River Kennet (ARK) is supporting the call to ban disposable vapes, having identified them as new and concerning threat to the River Kennet.

At the charity's recent annual Big Litter Pick in Marlborough volunteers waded the Kennet from Stonebridge Lane to Figgins Lane bridge in the centre of town removing 424 items from the river – from 'sold' house signs made from corrugated plastic to small plastic sweet wrappers. The litter collected in just a half day included 20 vapes, with most being found on the riverbed in the town centre. More than two thirds of the items removed were plastics.

Senior Project Officer Anna Forbes said:

“Disposable vapes are adding to the plastic pollution crisis in our rivers, additionally they contain heavy metals and toxic chemicals. Our volunteers are regularly finding carelessly disposed of vapes at the bottom of the river, with a notable increase at stretches of river that are public. The plastic casings of vapes will blight our rivers for many years before eventually breaking down into micro-plastics, that pollute our rivers posing yet another threat to water quality and the health of aquatic wildlife.”

The River Kennet is one of only 260 chalk streams in the world, and home to critically endangered species like the European eel. Most of the river is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), but despite this the

[ARK, Avebury, Elcot Park, Elcot Lane, Marlborough, Wiltshire, SN8 2BG](#)

river is already suffering from a multitude of pressures, including sewage pollution, agricultural runoff pollution, road surface runoff pollution, abstraction and climate change. We are very concerned about the impact of additional contamination from vapes on the unique and fragile chalk stream ecosystem.

The issue looks set to get worse due to the exponential rise in vaping, and disposable vapes becoming the most popular choice.

The number of disposable vapes thrown away in the UK has soared from 1.3 million to nearly five million per week – with use amongst children and young people seeing the most dramatic rises. Awareness of the health risks of vaping for children and young people is rising, but the risks of environmental damage are also significant.

ARK's findings in the river Kennet are backed up by survey results from Material Focus - 8% of 16-18 year-old vapers said they dropped single use vapes on the ground and 1% of all those surveyed flushed them down the toilet.

One reason for the high levels of irresponsible disposal is likely to be the lack of awareness about recycling. Another problem is that they are difficult to recycle, they contain lots of components, they have to be taken apart by hand to be recycled.

To address the issue, ARK is calling for a ban on disposable vapes and encouraging people to join them by responding to the [governments consultation on vaping](#). Find out more about this and other ways to help reduce vape pollution here: [Vapes Polluting Our Rivers - ARK River Kennet](#)

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For more details contact Anna Forbes. Email anna@riverkennet.org Tel 07780381709

Notes to editors

- ARK exists to protect and enhance the water environment in the whole Kennet catchment. They do this by practical habitat restoration, community engagement, citizen science, education and campaigning. Their activities extend to working with farmers, land managers and householders to promote efficient use of water and adoption of sustainable drainage.
- The non-profit Material Focus survey results can be found [here](#).

Images:



Action for the River Kennet



ARK volunteers removing vapes from the Kennet riverbed in Marlborough.

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