

National Pesticides and Drinking Water Action Group (NPDWAG)

Backweston AgriLabs Building – 29 May 2024

Attendees

The following organisations were represented at the meeting:

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Chair)	[DAFM]
Animal and Plant Health Association	[APHA]
Cork County Council	[CCC]
Environmental Protection Agency	[EPA]
Federation of Agrochemical Retail Merchants	[FARM]
Golf Ireland	[GI]
Health Service Executive	[HSE]
Teagasc/ASSAP	[Teagasc/ASSAP]
Uisce Éireann	[UÉ]

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed attendees to the hybrid meeting of the NPDWAG. Apologies received in advance from several members were noted. A new participant was welcomed, and the departure of two former members was acknowledged.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

There were no comments on the minutes of the previous meeting (28 February 2024).

Attendees were asked to forward specific text to the Chair by 12 June 2024 if they had any suggested amendments. The Chair noted that the minutes would be published on DAFM's pesticides website in due course –

www.pcs.agriculture.gov.ie/sud/waterprotection/nationalpesticidesanddrinkingwateractiongroup

Action update

- The DAFM guidance note on good practice during sprayer operations is now available on the DAFM pesticides website (www.pcs.agriculture.gov.ie/media/pesticides/content/sud/Guidance%20for%20Sprayer%20Operations%20170624.pdf). There has been positive feedback from professional users. Agricultural media (the Irish Farmers Journal and Agriland) also reported positively on the guidance.
- Work is ongoing by DAFM to review the list of pesticides monitored in drinking water.

3. Communications activities – (Uisce Éireann)

UÉ provided an update on the Spray with Care campaign, which was launched during April. This featured a press release issued to print, radio, online and TV outlets, which highlighted the positive message of a decline of over 50% in pesticide exceedances in drinking water since 2018.

The estimated reach of the campaign is 3.98 million so far, and the positive message has been well received. The story was covered by Midwest Radio and also featured on the RTE Six One News on 28 April.

The next steps will focus on communications in local priority areas, highlighting local stories and using local images where possible.

4. Uisce Éireann updates on drinking water exceedances and Catchment Focus Group activities

There are currently 26 EPA pesticide compliance plans open, serving a population of 311,505 – a decrease of 69,381 since the previous update (28/02/2024). One EPA pesticide compliance plan file has been closed since the previous meeting (South Louth East Meath). It may be possible to close some additional files soon, based on a season of full compliance during 2023. One scheme remains on the EPA Remedial Action List due to the risk of pesticide exceedances (Foynes/Shannon Estuary PWS, serving a population of 6,986).

Four exceedances of the parametric limit for pesticides have been recorded so far in 2024 (3 for 2,4-D and 1 exceedance of the total pesticides level).

UÉ catchments update – The ongoing work of Catchment Focus Groups (CFGs), involving collaboration by relevant stakeholders at a local level in priority catchments, was highlighted. CFGs are currently working in the following catchment areas – Lough Forbes (Longford Central), Newport, Clonroche, River Feale and Deel (Newcastle West PWS, Foynes/Shannon Estuary, Listowel, Abbeyfeale), Cavan (Belturbet PWS) and Greenmount-Dee (Louth). Meetings have been held recently by all six CFGs.

5. APHA catchment monitoring results and stewardship activities

Monitoring programme

The initial configuration of the monitoring programme for 2024 is as follows – Belturbet catchment (15 sampling points), Lough Forbes (four sampling points), Newport (eight sampling points), Deel (ten sampling points) and Feale (one sampling point). The programme is scheduled to run for 18 weeks in total (starting at the end of the first week in April and finishing at the end of September). Results to date show two exceedances in Belturbet, three in Lough Forbes and none in Newport, Deel or the Feale.

Stewardship – Container Management System

APHA continues to work with the Irish Farm Film Producers' Group (IFFPG) to encourage farmers to recycle empty, triple-rinsed pesticide containers. Very good progress is being made to reach the industry commitment of an average 75% collection rate of plastic pesticide and biopesticide containers across EU Member States by 2025. The collection rate in Ireland has increased significantly in recent years. The most recent estimate is 94.54% for 2023 but this is an over-estimate, since feedback from the collection centres indicates that a range of other types of plastic containers are also being collected, such as detergent containers. Survey work will be undertaken in 2024, involving sampling of collected containers to determine the proportion of pesticide containers, so that more accurate estimations of the pesticide container collection rate can be made.

It was confirmed during the meeting that IFFPG will accept empty triple-rinsed pesticide containers from golf courses as well as from farmers.

6. Update on sustainable use of pesticides and protection of water quality (DAFM)

The EU Commission withdrew its proposal for a Sustainable Use Regulation for pesticides on 6 February 2024. DAFM will continue to implement the measures of the existing Sustainable Use Directive (SUD) and will update Ireland's National Action Plan in this area.

DAFM have increased awareness of the requirements of SUD among pesticide users, especially in amenity, sports and specific areas, by identifying operators within these areas and providing targeted guidance documents on the requirements of SUD. There has also been engagement via webinars and meetings with a wide range of representative bodies for various stakeholders to highlight the requirements of SUD and water protection. Registered premises involved in the sale of plant protection products have also been reminded of their responsibilities.

7. Updates on actions planned for 2024

Attendees were reminded that all relevant activities should be recorded in the UÉ 'Action Tracker' spreadsheet.

8. Other stakeholder updates

- Teagasc noted that the DAFM guidance note on good practice during sprayer operations is proving to be useful for advisors, and asked that the note be updated to mention the minimum 3 m no-spray aquatic buffer zone required for any watercourse subject to CAP conditionality.
- GI indicated that their Sustainability Hub is now in operation. This will help achieve more sustainable use of pesticides by golf clubs. Further details can be provided at a future meeting.

9. AOB

- An incident of apparent inappropriate pesticide use adjacent to a watercourse in an amenity area was raised by the EPA. Possibilities for increasing awareness about responsible pesticide use in such settings were discussed. DAFM has engaged in awareness raising activities for this sector and will progress further actions (e.g. additional engagement with TidyTowns committees).
- The EPA gave a brief update on a recent meeting where Member States approaches for monitoring pesticides in drinking water were discussed, and also monitoring for pesticide metabolites.