

An update following the reporting of investigation of the pollution from diazinon sheep dip completed in April 2025 (see accompanying report)

All the parties concerned (NRW, DCWW, Gwaredu scab project) had an active input to the design and implementation of the 2024/25 investigation with NRW funding the costs of chemical analysis. Agreement from all parties was obtained on its findings and the report recommendations. The major finding of the study was that significant contamination of streams can occur from the loss of diazinon from the fleece of grazing sheep post dipping. This finding was remarkable given the small scale of the investigation and the fact that farms were either assessed as low risk of pollution and, in one occasion, the inappropriate location of sampling sites. A more comprehensive study is required to properly evaluate all the sources and pollution pathways (inc dipping and land disposal of waste sheep dip) which was the key recommendation. This is essential for the establishment of an effective pollution prevention strategy. The extent of pollution currently occurring emphasises the need. The 2025 interim WFD classification of rivers showed that 7 water bodies failed because of diazinon. But only 64 sites had sufficient data to allow determination of compliance for diazinon. If these results are representative of the proportion of water bodies failing in the whole data set (and there is no reason to believe otherwise) then of the 726 river water bodies, 80 (11%) would fail because of diazinon.

Despite this evidence, NRW failed to implement the key recommendation of the report which was completed in April 2025. Instead, another small-scale investigation was initiated but this didn't happen until late on in the dipping season (monitoring of 5 farms during January/February 2026). This restricted selection of suitable farms for investigation which is likely to further limit the value of the investigation (results not yet available). NRW have taken action to no longer issue new permits for land spreading of sheep dip waste but there are over 900 existing permits so this will continue to be a significant source of pollution. And this is only one of the potential pollution pathways as the investigation demonstrated.

Diazinon was the focus of the report but it also drew attention to the extent of WFD failures due to cypermethrin. Cypermethrin is even more hazardous to aquatic life than diazinon as it is highly toxic to aquatic life and is responsible for the failure of 21 water bodies in the 2025 interim WFD classification. But again there was only sufficient data to determine compliance for 64 water bodies. If this data is extrapolated to the whole data set then 240 water bodies approximately would fail because of cypermethrin. Cypermethrin was banned for use as a sheep dip but it is still permitted as a pour-on for cattle and sheep as a pesticide treatment, and also in other uses in agriculture (spray for some arable crops inc. rapeseed and carrots) and as an active ingredient in some pet shampoos. Approximately 13,000 kg (as active ingredient) is used in the UK annually.

Following the investigation Afonydd Cymru raised its concerns about diazinon in a letter to NRW in January this year. This was responded to in a joint letter from NRW and WG. Surprisingly this response made no reference to the findings of the NRW sponsored study. An additional concern is that it has become apparent that the results of the investigation were misrepresented in an end of financial year Gwaredu scab report prepared by Gelli Aur in 2025. This report underplayed the results referring to the very low concentrations of diazinon in stream water which may have influenced Welsh Government's perception of the issue.

Summary of issues raised

NRW should be challenged about their failure to implement the findings of the report or properly represent its findings.

The reporting of WFD failures by NRW does not acknowledge the fact that the failures for both diazinon and cypermethrin are based on a restricted number of water bodies thus the significance of the data is hugely downplayed and is therefore misleading. This should be addressed in future reporting of WFD compliance.

The scale of failures and the potential environmental impact of these two chemicals demands urgent action.

The following questions arise:

Does NRW now accept the seriousness of this situation? And has WG been sufficiently alerted to the scale of the problem?

Are there strategies are being proposed/implemented by NRW to address pollution from these chemicals?

Is there insufficient evidence of sources and pollution pathways that would be necessary to determine an appropriate strategy? If not has NRW identified evidence gaps and the investigations required to address them?

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