

# Culverting Watercourses

Internal Policy 169\_19

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**Audience:** All Environment Agency staff, particularly those involved in designing, permitting or responding to works on watercourses.

This Internal Policy and the associated [Guidance 170\\_19](#) should be used for internal works and be used to provide advice to local planning authorities, lead local flood authorities, internal drainage boards, drainage and highways authorities, developers, consultants, landowners and the general public.

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## Purpose

In implementing this Internal Policy we will:

- provide clarity with respect to culverting in a single statement for internal and external use;
  - demonstrate how we will take action to protect the continuity and integrity of watercourses;
  - recommend this approach to all drainage authorities in England and provide guidance for developers and landowners;
  - make staff aware of our position and ensure a nationally consistent approach to culverting.
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## Policy Wording

We are opposed to the culverting of any watercourse because of the adverse ecological, flood risk, geomorphological, human safety and aesthetic impacts. Watercourses are important linear features of the landscape and should be maintained as continuous corridors to maximise their benefits to society.

We will normally object to proposals to build over existing culverts because of health and safety considerations, increased maintenance costs and complexities and because future options to restore the watercourse may be precluded. We will, where we deem appropriate, take possible cumulative impacts into account when making decisions.

We will actively pursue the restoration of culverted watercourses to open channels.

This Internal Policy and the associated [Guidance 170\\_19](#) should be complied with when developing Environment Agency projects, when assessing and determining Flood Risk Activity Permit applications, and when providing advice to local planning authorities on development proposals involving culverting.

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### **Culverting permit and planning applications**

Applicants will be expected to demonstrate why culverting is both necessary and the only reasonable and practicable alternative. Alternatives could include open span bridges, revisions to site layout or diversion of the watercourse. Where it has been robustly demonstrated that the culverting is both necessary and the only reasonable practicable alternative, the length of any culvert should be restricted to the minimum necessary to meet the applicant's objective.

Applicants should provide appropriate assessments to demonstrate that culverting will not increase flood risk elsewhere and will not result in an unacceptable impact on channel stability and the habitat(s) and species present. They should demonstrate that mitigation and compensation measures will be put in place to reduce or nullify any impacts to our satisfaction.

When designing the culvert, the applicant should take into account the predicted impacts of climate change (using an allowance for climate change), natural channel geomorphology and any future development planned in the catchment. All mitigation measures should be incorporated within the design and the work should be carried out using best working practice to minimise environmental impacts.

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### **Culverting without permission**

If a culvert is constructed (or altered) on a [main river](#) without permission, the Environment Agency may remove, alter or pull down the work and recover its expenses from the person who carried it out. Alternatively the Environment Agency could request the installer to remove or alter the culvert at their own expense.

If a culvert is constructed (or altered) on any watercourse in such a way which causes a breach of planning control, as defined in section 171A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the local planning authority have a range of powers to take proportionate enforcement action in the public interest.

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