

## CSR case studies



### **AWG plc**

**“RiverCare” programme a community approach to involving communities in cleaning up watercourses.**

#### ● **The company**

AWG Plc’s principal business is Anglian Water, the Group’s regulated water and wastewater company. The Group also includes Morrison, a support services business, and AWG Property, a specialist property development company.

Anglian Water is geographically the largest of the water and wastewater companies in England and Wales, supplying water to just over four-and-a-half million customers in an area stretching from the Humber to the Thames estuary and from Northamptonshire to the east coast. It is the driest area in the UK. Despite this and the increasing demand for water – the region’s population has grown by 20% since the company was established in 1989 – there have been no water restrictions for its customers since 1991.

Corporate responsibility (CR), as AWG calls corporate social responsibility, is an integral part of the way Anglian Water does business. It has developed seven CR standards that cover safety, people, community, environment, risk, integrity and accountability. Through these standards, the company reinforces the importance of making decisions based on social and environmental considerations, as well as economic ones.

The environmental management of the region is key to the future operations of Anglian Water. Most of its water supplies come from reservoirs that are pumped water from groundwater aquifers. The quality of this water

is important. If it is of poor quality then it needs to be cleaned, costing the company time, resources and money. If the natural environment for water is clean then there is less need for quality improvements.

Its customers live in this same environment so their behaviour and the shared overall stewardship of water is important to the company. To ensure its customers recognise this, Anglian Water has new public awareness campaigns that aim to educate the public about important water issues. For example, the *Waterwise* campaign fronted by the television celebrity Bill Oddie informs the public of the importance of domestic water conservation.

This case study focuses on Anglian Water’s RiverCare community programme, which supports community groups’ involvement in improving local river environments.

#### ● **The drivers**

The major driver for Anglian Water’s RiverCare programme was to improve customer recognition for its investment in environmental water quality. This will increase awareness amongst customers of the need for waste water management and lessen the impact of the necessary management costs.

#### ● **Taking action**

RiverCare is a brand name for Anglian Water’s inland water investment programme initiated in 2000. The programme covers specific

agreements made with its environmental regulator, the Environment Agency, and includes: the improvement of emergency and storm overflows to stop wastewater entering rivers and causing flooding during heavy storms; the removal of nutrients – phosphorous and/or nitrate that can cause an overgrowth of algae in rivers; and to improve biodiversity in the region through continuing to improve the quality of the rivers and so allowing different species such as fish and otters to return and increase in rivers. The actions AWG take in meeting these requirements are not CSR driven, but compliance driven.

This programme followed a five-year coastal water investment programme called Blue Flag, which resulted in many of the region's beaches improving and meeting EU water bathing standards. The company recognised the value of having Blue Flag as a brand name, as without it the public were harder to engage. Blue Flag was seen by the public as a positive thing and because of this there was less opposition to the things the company needed to do, for example digging up the middle of Great Yarmouth in the height of summer to lay new waste water pipes. The learning from this programme was incorporated into its inland water management programme. For example, the importance of a brand name, hence the RiverCare name.

The public identity of the RiverCare programme is its community approach whereby community groups can help to manage watercourses – canals, rivers, streams and ditches. This approach demonstrates AWG's CSR, as it involves taking action above the legal requirements.

Local groups adopt a stretch of river and take part in a range of activities aimed at improving local river environments. These activities can include; litter picking, monitoring and recording wildlife, helping out on more specific conservation projects such as riverbank management. Each RiverCare volunteer group is assigned a RiverCare co-ordinator who provides advice on getting started and

safety. The group also gets a starter kit that includes equipment for litter clean ups, contacts with experts for further advice and help with further funding opportunities. RiverCare also provides free insurance cover for most types of community groups and there is a dedicated RiverCare website ([www.rivercare.org.uk](http://www.rivercare.org.uk)).

RiverCare is funded by Anglian Water, managed by Encams and supported by the Environment Agency. Encams (which runs the Keep Britain Tidy campaign) previously partnered Anglian Water on its coastal water management programme and runs the national seaside awards. It was seen as a natural partner for the RiverCare programme. Encams provides two full-time programme managers, and Anglian Water six employees. Encams also brings its social expertise to the partnership and is continuing to help Anglian Water expand the scope of the project to include broader aspects of environmental quality, including tackling anti-social behaviour, for example fly tipping.

The results of the programme are recorded and published in the company's annual Environment Report. During 2005, 26 different volunteer groups held more than 90 events across the region. They removed rubbish that would fill 450 wheelie bins. They also raised awareness of wildlife species, such as the white-claw crayfish and water vole with local communities, and carried out water shrew surveys in every county of the region providing data on its distribution and status.

#### **Keeping momentum....**

For the first five years of the RiverCare programme Anglian Water had waited for volunteer groups to contact them. So when the decision was made to continue the programme for a further five years (up to the end of 2010) it was also decided to be more proactive in raising awareness of the programme and its work. This resulted in the RiverCare team actively contacting community groups. It also resulted in the shopping trolley art campaign. This campaign was funded by a separate budget from the Communications

division and a grant from the Government's Arts and Business New Partners.

The shopping trolley art campaign seeks to capture the public's imagination by taking dumped shopping trolleys from watercourses and making sculptures from them. The art is to highlight RiverCare and spearhead a recruitment campaign, encouraging more volunteers to adopt a stretch of local river by getting involved in, or setting up, a local RiverCare group.

The artist Ptolemy Elrington was commissioned by Anglian Water to transform discarded shopping trolleys into ten beautiful sculptures of riverside wildlife. One example is a water vole, a creature whose population is increasing due to improved river management. The artist has subsequently become an ambassador for the RiverCare programme.

● **The business benefits**

The benefits of the RiverCare programme to the business have been its contribution to meeting two of its five corporate objectives that directly relate to its five-year business plan. The objectives are to seek to have positive sustainable impacts on the environment and to seek to be recognised by its customers for the contribution to their communities.

"RiverCare helps deliver Anglian Water's community and environmental programmes and affects its bottom line because it improves customer relationships. Customers can see how much more the company does than just send a water bill at the end of every quarter" said Carol Green, Anglian Water's CR Policy and Performance Manager: "It also demonstrates how we are helping enhance their lives by improving water courses and looking after their water".

The shopping trolley art campaign has generated positive PR for the company helping increase profile. For example it has generated more than 75 media hits, including appearances on two national and 15 regional TV programmes; 15 radio shows; and features

and mentions in two national and 15 regional newspapers.

● **Why is it CSR?**

Engaging with the communities in which a company operates is a key component of CR. The RiverCare community programme provides an investment in community groups with equipment, health and safety training, insurance and information from packs and websites. All of these activities go beyond compliance, as it had no legal obligation to support community groups clean up of watercourses.

● **What next?**

The programme is currently exploring ways to increase employee participation through the existing "give me five" volunteering programme. It is hoped that employees could help develop their own skills and work closer to local communities through RiverCare at the same time as helping clean up the environment.

Some of the shopping trolley sculptures will be on permanent displays at Anglian Water's visitor centres and offices, while the rest will be shown at exhibitions and RiverCare events around the Anglian Water region.

**Contact us:**

Any comments on this profile?  
Would you like your organisation to be profiled?

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