

# Water workers suffer machete attacks and broken jaws, poll shows



## Almost half of water workers say abuse they receive has increased due to sewage dumping

A GMB survey, answered by almost 1,300 workers, revealed they had been attacked with machetes, suffered broken jaws and been deliberately splashed with raw sewage while at work. [1]



Many reported feeling unsafe working alone and 52 per cent said they believed reports of sewage being dumped and increased pollution had contributed to an increase in abuse.

In addition, questions answered by just under 700 workers in the water sector revealed:

- One in five (21.55 per cent) had seen unreported spills in the past year
- Just one in five (19.83 per cent) thought the physical infrastructure of waste water treatment works and the wider sewage network was kept in a good enough condition to minimise sewage leaks or discharges
- One in five (22 per cent) has either been encouraged to underreport sewage spills, or knows a colleague who has.

“ One in three UK water workers verbally abused amid sewage fury, GMB finds  
<https://t.co/3nyDWaTfOm>

– Guardian news (@guardiannews) April 3, 2024

**Gary Carter, GMB National Officer, said:**

“No one should go to work and face abuse.

“But this situation is horrifying, because the negligent actions of water bosses in allowing sewage dumping to rocket has exposed their own workers to physical and verbal violence.

“In many cases, water bosses are actively discouraging the reporting of spills – which is a complete dereliction of duty.

“GMB demands a zero tolerance approach to the abuse of water workers – and calls on water shareholders to fork out for the desperately need infrastructure to stop record sewage spills.”





### Selected testimony of GMB members

- I've been physically assaulted by minors while shutting down a vandalised fire hydrant while their parents stood laughing, something which is becoming commonplace
- Employee was attacked with a machete and we heard little of it.
- One member of staff has been violently assaulted and was off work for weeks with a broken jaw. This has led me to not interacting with members of the public.
- Feel unsafe working alone in a lot more places and areas than I used to.
- I never reported the verbal abuse as I've grown use to it over the years, from having pies thrown at us to being threatened because I was blocking a road
- When on Fleetwood incident the area was very hostile as we were there a few weeks the locals were very unhappy which is understandable we had to call the police numerous times
- I will not wear company logo clothing due to fear of being harassed/questioned by the public. I was horrified to learn that some of my colleagues have received abuse and threats from the public. One instance where sewage spill in a road and drivers were purposefully splashing staff with sewage. He was soaked. It was in his eyes and face. Appalling and disgusting behaviour by the publics.



- Don't feel safe lone working at nights or in dark
- Employer is very concerned about their image. Doubtful how determined they would be in pursuing appropriate action against serious abusers
- If wearing work uniform in a public place such as a supermarket, staff will treat myself in water industry clothing differently and tend to be very rude and cold.
- When working at night we sometimes request to be doubled up but feel pressured to attend single manned



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### Member requiring help?

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