



Chironomids at Thames Water sites

Thames Water is aware of the nuisance caused to customers who live close to some of our sites by swarming Chironomids (also known as midges) and this leaflet explains what we are doing to alleviate the problem.



We are currently investigating environmentally friendly methods to help alleviate the nuisance, including:

- Using water sprays to discourage Chironomids from entering sensitive areas
- Setting up brightly coloured markers in strategic locations which it is hoped will attract Chironomids away from sensitive zones, such as residential areas

In the longer term, we are embarking upon a programme of research to identify the main problem species of Chironomid and the factors that influence them. This should allow us to identify effective ways in which to control the Chironomid populations at our sites in future. We are in close liaison with leading UK experts in this field.

We wish to assure you that we are taking this matter very seriously indeed and will do all we can to alleviate the discomfort you have been suffering.

There are now many legal limitations imposed on the use of insecticides and we are obliged to comply with them. Even if allowed to use insecticides, it would be impossible to completely eradicate the Chironomids as they occur naturally near all areas of open water.

Chironomids are an essential part of the food chain, being vital food for birds and other wildlife on and around our sites, so eliminating them entirely could have a serious impact on local wildlife.

What are Chironomids?

- Chironomids are flying insects that vary in size depending on the type of species.
- There are many different species that emerge at different times of the year mainly between March to October.
- They spend most of their lives as larvae living in the mud at the bottom of water or deep down on reservoir banks.
- The adult stage lasts for only about 1 week during which time they swarm as part of the mating process.

Are Chironomids a health hazard?

- Although the swarming of these insects, sometimes in considerable density, can be a nuisance, they are NOT harmful or hazardous to health.
- Chironomids have no mouth parts and are unable to bite, nor sting.
- They do not spread disease.

Why can't Thames Water get rid of them?

- Chironomids and their larvae are an important part of the foodchain for other insects and birds.
- It is illegal to apply insecticide where there is a risk that it could drift into other properties.
- Some reservoirs (including the Staines reservoirs) are sites of special scientific interest (SSSI's) - legally protected sites of national wildlife importance. Others (again including Staines reservoirs) are Special Protection Areas (SPA's) - legally protected sites of European importance for their bird life. This means we have a statutory duty not to adversely affect the wildlife interest of the reservoirs.

Will the proposed measures work?

As stated earlier, it is impossible to completely eradicate these creatures and doing so would be damaging the nature conservation interest of the sites.

We have been in liaison with English Nature to examine options available for controlling Chironomid populations whilst at the same time safeguarding the wildlife interest at the reservoirs.

It is anticipated that the measures proposed will help reduce and control the nuisance in a balanced and environmental way.

What if I need more information?

We have put in place a system to log and respond to all calls so please help us by directing your calls to our

24 hour Customer Centre on **0845 9200 800** (local call rates apply)

Such calls are logged and help us to target the specific areas where the nuisance is actually occurring.