

WHEN AND WHERE TO TEST

Choosing a location to test is a vital part of your citizen science programme, and depends on what your campaign objectives are. Below, we've set out some options for testing locations and some general guidance on finding a good testing site:

General guidance

Your testing site needs to be safe and accessible, with access to water that is **at least 1m deep**. If you're testing a river, we recommend testing from a bridge, as you can reach the centre of the river easily. If you're testing from the beach, consider harbour walls, jetties or piers. We've provided further guidance on this in the 'How to take a sample' section.

If the site isn't on public land, you'll need to make sure you have permission from the landowner to test there. If you're not sure who that is, take a look through the 'Landowner, Liability and Access' section of this page: [Useful links - Protecting Wild Waters](#)

You may also want to consider:

- Testing on an incoming tide vs outgoing tide.
- Spring and neap tides impacting dilution

Sharing your sample collection location with the lab

The lab will arrange collection of your sample for delivery, but you'll need to provide the lab with a What3Words location for your location (where the sample is being picked up from, not your testing site).

To do this:

- Go to [what3words.com](https://www.what3words.com) in your web browser.
- Use the search bar to enter an address, landmark, or coordinates. You can also manually navigate the map by clicking and dragging.
- Zoom in and click on the specific 3m x 3m square where you need the location. A three-word address (e.g., **///ocean.candle.chair**) will appear.

Share this with Kirsty and Lizzie by completing [Citizen Science 2025 Onboarding](#)

Finding the right location for you

Finding the testing location that's right for you depends on your campaign objectives. To help you get started, we've provided some guidance below.

CastCo offer some good advice on how to define the purpose of your monitoring: [Guidance: defining your primary monitoring purpose - CastCo](#)

Option 1:

CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVE

To get an overall picture of your site's water quality, or understand how it could impact the health of water users.

TESTING LOCATION

Sample where most people use the water. If no-one uses the water regularly, find a safe spot that feels representative of the body of water.

WHEN TO TEST

The same spot, the same time every week

CONSIDERATIONS

After 10 tests, you can start to use the bathing water classification calculator to identify if your waterway is 'Poor', 'Sufficient', 'Good' or 'Excellent'

You could also count water users each week, and collect sickness reports, to build a clear link between water quality and human health.

Option 2:

CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVE

To prove or understand how a particular source of pollution affects the waterway

TESTING LOCATION

Sample downstream of the CSO or pollution source. You should monitor 100m downstream to isolate any effect.

WHEN TO TEST

You could:

Get alerts from our sewage alert app, Safer Seas and Rivers Service and sample then (if the site is a bathing water).

Sample after rainfall.

Sample after CSO spills using the [real-time sewage map](#).

Sample when you suspect pollution is happening from another source.

CONSIDERATIONS

You may want to consider how you the data you collect proves the pollution source is having an impact.

This could mean comparing to regulator data. Or it could mean testing upstream and downstream of a pollution source and comparing results.

Option 3:

CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVE

To prove that water quality monitoring should happen year-round at designated bathing waters.

TESTING LOCATION

Sample where the regulator tests. Find the location on the Regulator's website. (See below).

WHEN TO TEST

The same spot every week where people use the water. The day and time change each week.

CONSIDERATIONS

This is only applicable for existing bathing waters.

You can find out where the regulator tests by finding your bathing water profile here:

England

[Environment Agency \(EA\)](#)

Northern Ireland

[The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(DAERA\)](#)

Scotland

[Scottish Environment Protection Agency \(SEPA\)](#)

Wales

[Natural Resources Wales \(NRW\)](#)

After collecting a year of data, you can calculate your bathing water classification [here](#) and compare it to the regulator's result.

Option 4:

CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVE

Raising awareness: to engage with stakeholders and media

TESTING LOCATION

A hybrid approach, where you test semi-regularly in a few locations such as near a pollution source, where people use the water, before an event on the waterway or where regulators test.

WHEN TO TEST

Reactive monitoring to shine a light on a particular issue. Consolidate sampling to multiple locations in one day.

CONSIDERATIONS

Think about how you'll use this data to engage with stakeholders (for instance, a press release, an event, social media campaigns, a certain resource like a flyer or infographic) *before* starting to sample. This will help make sure you're able to really gather the exact information you need.