

Sellafield Particles in the Environment Update (1 January to 31 March 2026)

1 Progress and areas monitored

During the period 1st January to 31st March 2026 a total area of 28 ha of the beaches along the Cumbrian coast were monitored against a programme target of 22 ha. A total of 9 particles and 0 larger objects¹ were detected and recovered, details are given in Table 1. The overall target for the 2026 programme is to monitor an area of 105 ha. Further details of the programme can be found in the annual report series².

2 Find rates

Average find rates were compared with find rates over the last two calendar years in Table 2 and the last four years in Figure 1. For clarity of presentation, the find rates in Table 2 were rounded to the nearest significant figure. The find rates for alpha-rich³ particles, beta-rich particles and beta-rich larger objects are comparable with the average find rates from previous years.

The find rate for beta-rich particles at Sellafield beach appears to be higher than previous years but this is due to the historically low find rate and that the two finds were recovered from a relatively small area of beach monitoring (13 ha). A similar find rate was observed in Q1 of 2024 when there were 3 beta-rich particle finds at Sellafield beach from 12 ha of beach monitoring.

Find rates to date in 2026 did not require any form of intervention through the Environment Agency (EA) Notification and Intervention Protocol⁴.

3 Find activities

Figure 2 shows the activities of alpha-rich particles and beta-rich particles were comparable to the activities measured since May 2014 (when the current version of the monitoring equipment was introduced).

None of the finds recovered to date in 2026 were of sufficient activity to require characterisation through the EA Notification and Intervention Protocol⁴.

4 Summary of programme

Table 3 presents a summary of the beach monitoring programme since it started in 2006. Overall, a total of 3,090 ha of beaches have been monitored and 3,681 particles and larger objects have been recovered and analysed.

5 Conclusion

The UK Health Security Agency risk assessment for radioactive particles and larger objects on West Cumbrian beaches reported that:

- “overall health risks for beach users are very low, and significantly lower than other risks that people accept when using the beaches.”; and that
- “measures to control these risks are not warranted on public health grounds.”

¹ "Particles" are finds less than 2 mm in diameter and "larger objects" are finds greater than or equal to 2mm in diameter (includes: granules, gravel, pebbles, stones etc.)

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/sellafield-ltd-environmental-and-safety-reports>

³ "Alpha-rich" are finds with ²⁴¹Am activity greater than ¹³⁷Cs activity, "beta-rich" are finds with ¹³⁷Cs activity greater than ²⁴¹Am activity and "Co-60 rich" are finds with positive ⁶⁰Co activity greater than the ¹³⁷Cs activity.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sellafield-radioactive-objects-notification-and-intervention-plan/sellafield-radioactive-objects-notification-and-intervention-plan>

Table 1: Beach finds in 2026 (to 31st March 2026).

Beach location	Area covered (ha)	No. of particles found				No. of larger objects found				Total finds
		Alpha-rich	Beta-rich	Other	Not analysed	Alpha-rich	Beta-rich	Other	Not analysed	
Allonby	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northern beaches	11	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Sellafield	13	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Southern beaches	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
All	28	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	9

Note 1: Proportion of particles as % of total finds = 100%.

Table 2: Find per hectare and area monitored for main beach areas (to 31st March 2026).

Beach location	Year	Area covered (ha)	Find category & Type (finds per hectare)			
			Alpha-rich particle	Beta-rich particle	Beta-rich larger object	Other finds
Allonby	2024	5	0	0	0	0
	2025	5	0	0	0	0
	2026	0	NA	NA	NA	NA
Northern beaches	2024	35	<1	0	<0.1	0
	2025	35	<1	0	0	0
	2026	11	<1	0	0	0
Sellafield	2024	56	<1	<0.1	<1	0
	2025	55	<1	<0.1	<0.1	0
	2026	13	<1	<1	0	0
Southern beaches	2024	22	<1	0	0	0
	2025	22	0	0	0	0
	2026	4	IA	0	0	0

Note 2: IA – Finds have been recovered however there is insufficient area coverage to estimate finds rates (<10 ha area covered).

NA - No monitoring to date.

"<1" denotes values between 0.1 and 0.99.

"<0.1" denotes values between zero and 0.099.

Table 3: Summary of beach monitoring data since programme began in 2006 (to 31st March 2026).

Beach location	Area (ha)	Total		Alpha-rich		Beta-rich		Co-60 rich	
		Particle	Larger object	Particle	Larger object	Particle	Larger object	Particle	Larger object
Allonby	139	21	1	19	0	2	1	0	0
Northern Beaches	1018	930	1	873	0	51	1	6	0
Sellafield	1182	1817	741	1468	6	340	733	9	2
Southern Beaches	673	144	6	119	0	25	4	0	2
Other Beaches	78	19	1	17	0	2	1	0	0
All	3090	2931	750	2496	6	420	740	15	4

Note: Northern beaches are St Bees and Braystones, Southern beaches are Seascale and Drigg. Allonby and Sellafield are included specifically. All other beaches (e.g. Whitehaven, Workington, Silecroft etc.) are incorporated into the "Other beaches" definition. A single additional particle (2.8 kBq Am-241; 02/04/2012) was recovered by seabed grab sampling and is not included in the above table.

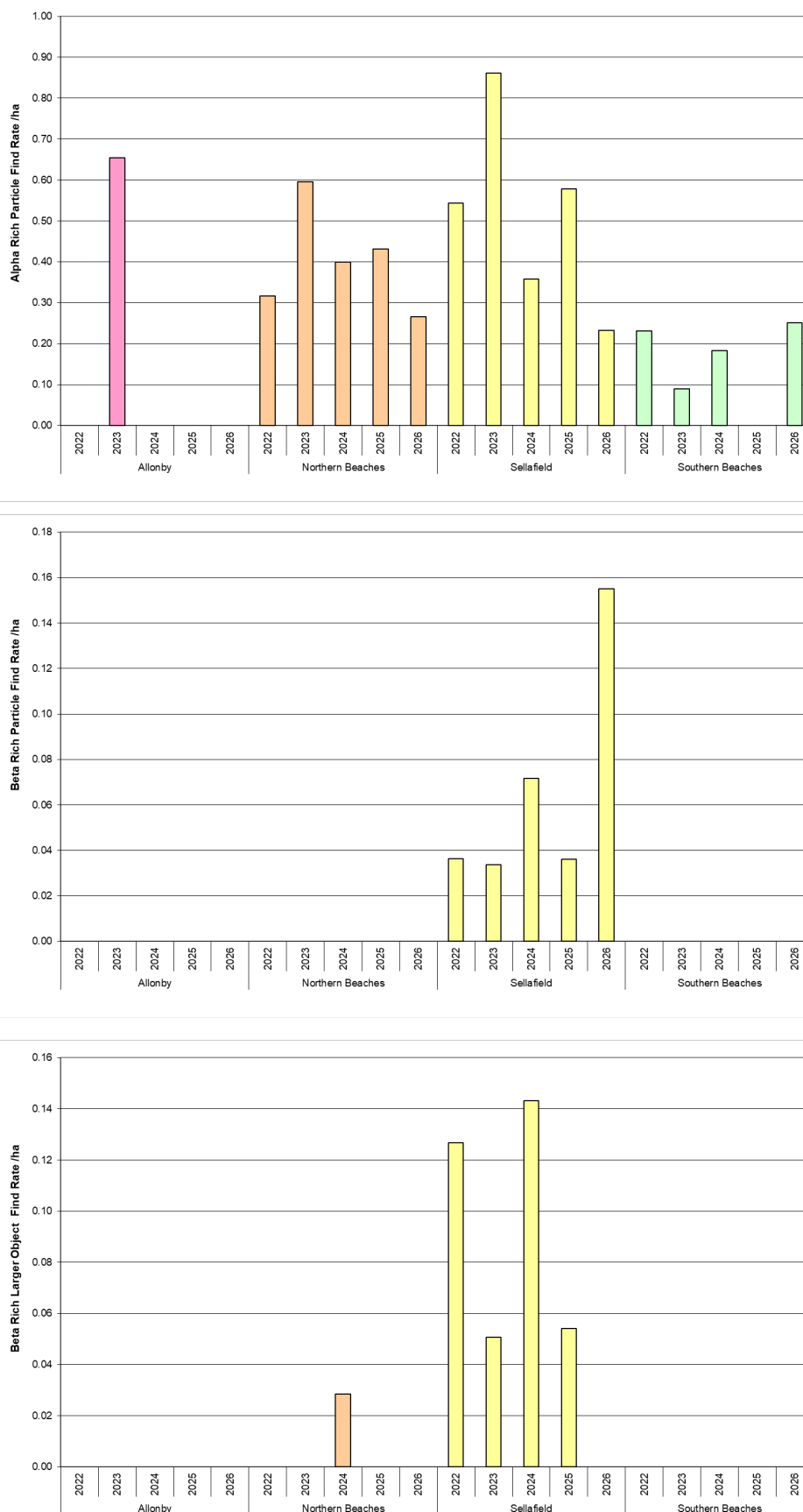
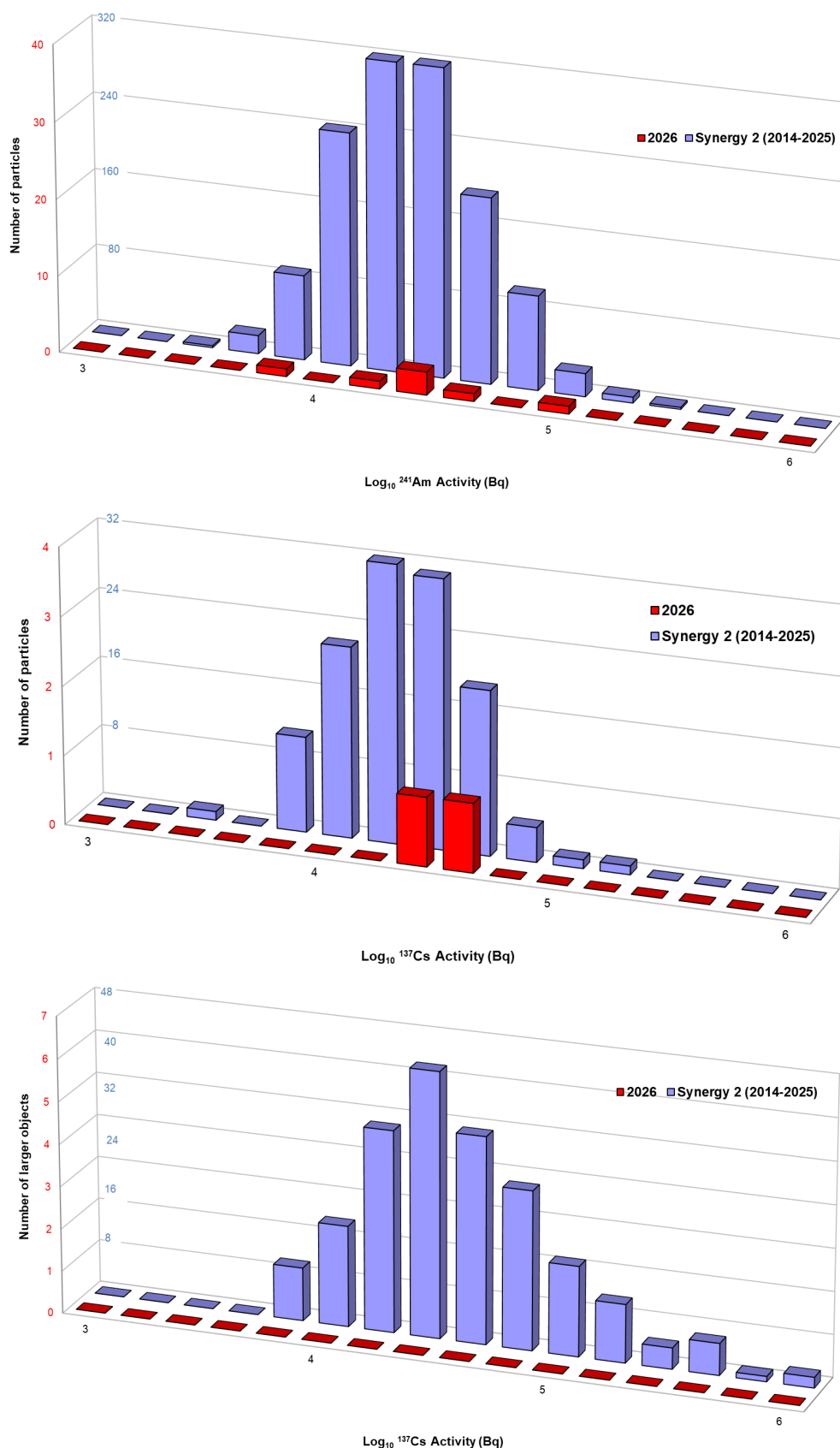


Figure 1: Find rates of alpha-rich particles (upper), beta-rich particles (middle) and beta-rich larger objects (lower) 2022 – 2026. Note that find rates in 2026 are for finds to 31st March 2026 and not the annual rate.



Note 3: Different scales used for 2026 and Synergy2 datasets.

Figure 2: Radioactivity of finds classified as alpha-rich particles (top), beta-rich particles (middle) and beta-rich larger objects (lower) between May 2014 – December 2025 (termed "Synergy2" and shown in blue) compared to data from 2026 (termed "2026" and shown in red).