

Sellafield Particles in the Environment Update (1 January to 10 July 2026)

1 Progress and areas monitored

During the period 1st January to 10th July 2026 a total area of 73 ha of the beaches along the Cumbrian coast were monitored against a programme target of 65 ha. A total of 28 particles and 1 larger object¹ 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 is in line with previous years. No further beta-rich finds have been recovered following the two recovered in Q1 2026.

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 3,135 ha of beaches have been monitored and 3,701 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 10st July 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	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northern beaches	20	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Sellafield	35	17	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	20
Southern beaches	13	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
All	73	26	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	29

Note 1: Proportion of particles as % of total finds = 97%.

Table 2: Find per hectare and area monitored for main beach areas (to 10th July 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	5	0	0	0	0
Northern beaches	2024	35	<1	0	<0.1	0
	2025	35	<1	0	0	0
	2026	20	<1	0	0	0
Sellafield	2024	56	<1	<0.1	<1	0
	2025	55	<1	<0.1	<0.1	0
	2026	35	<1	<0.1	<0.1	0
Southern beaches	2024	22	<1	0	0	0
	2025	22	0	0	0	0
	2026	13	<1	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 10th July 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	144	21	1	19	0	2	1	0	0
Northern Beaches	1027	933	1	876	0	51	1	6	0
Sellafield	1204	1831	742	1482	6	340	734	9	2
Southern Beaches	682	146	6	121	0	25	4	0	2
Other Beaches	78	19	1	17	0	2	1	0	0
All	3135	2950	751	2515	6	420	741	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.

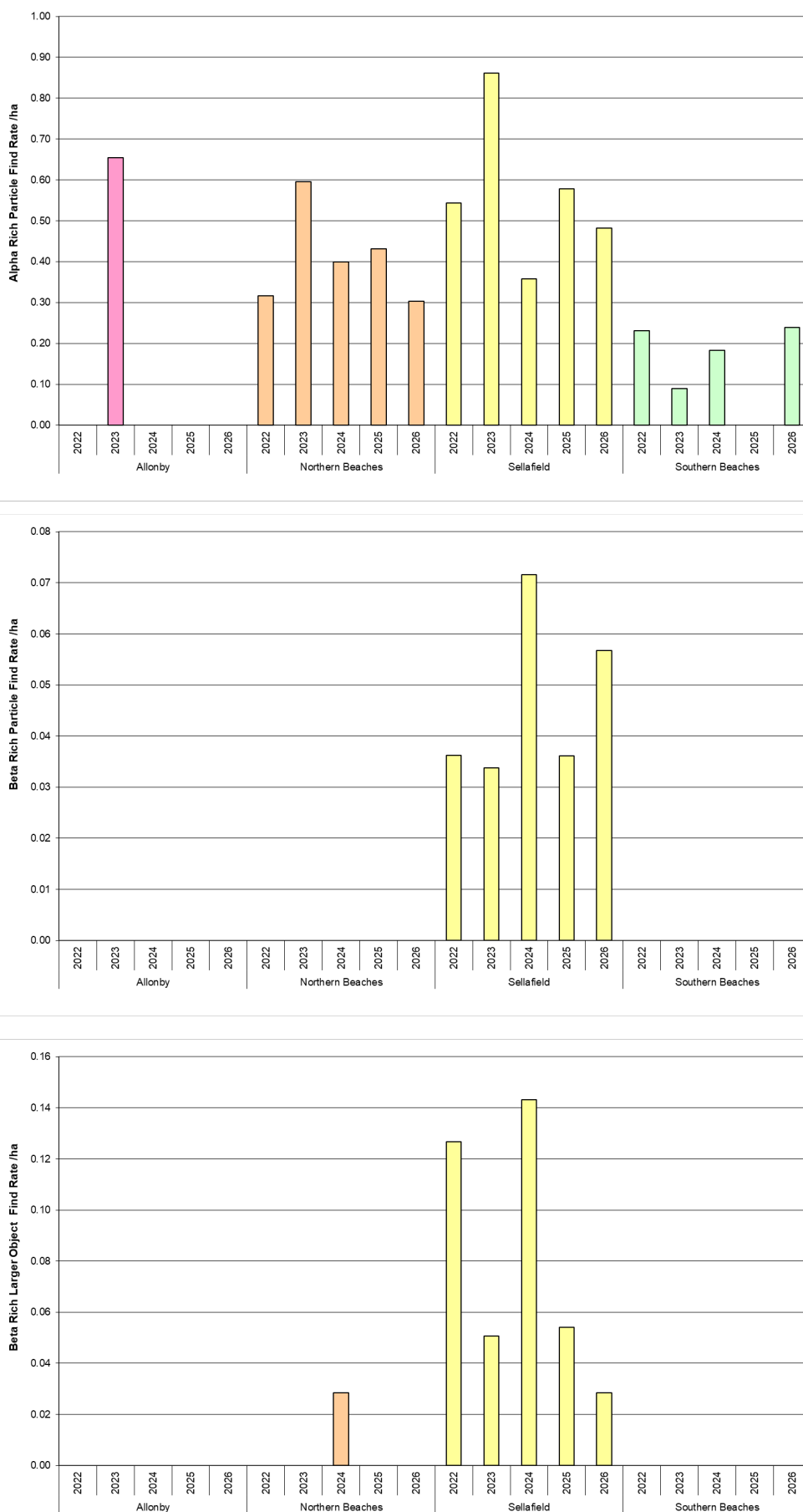
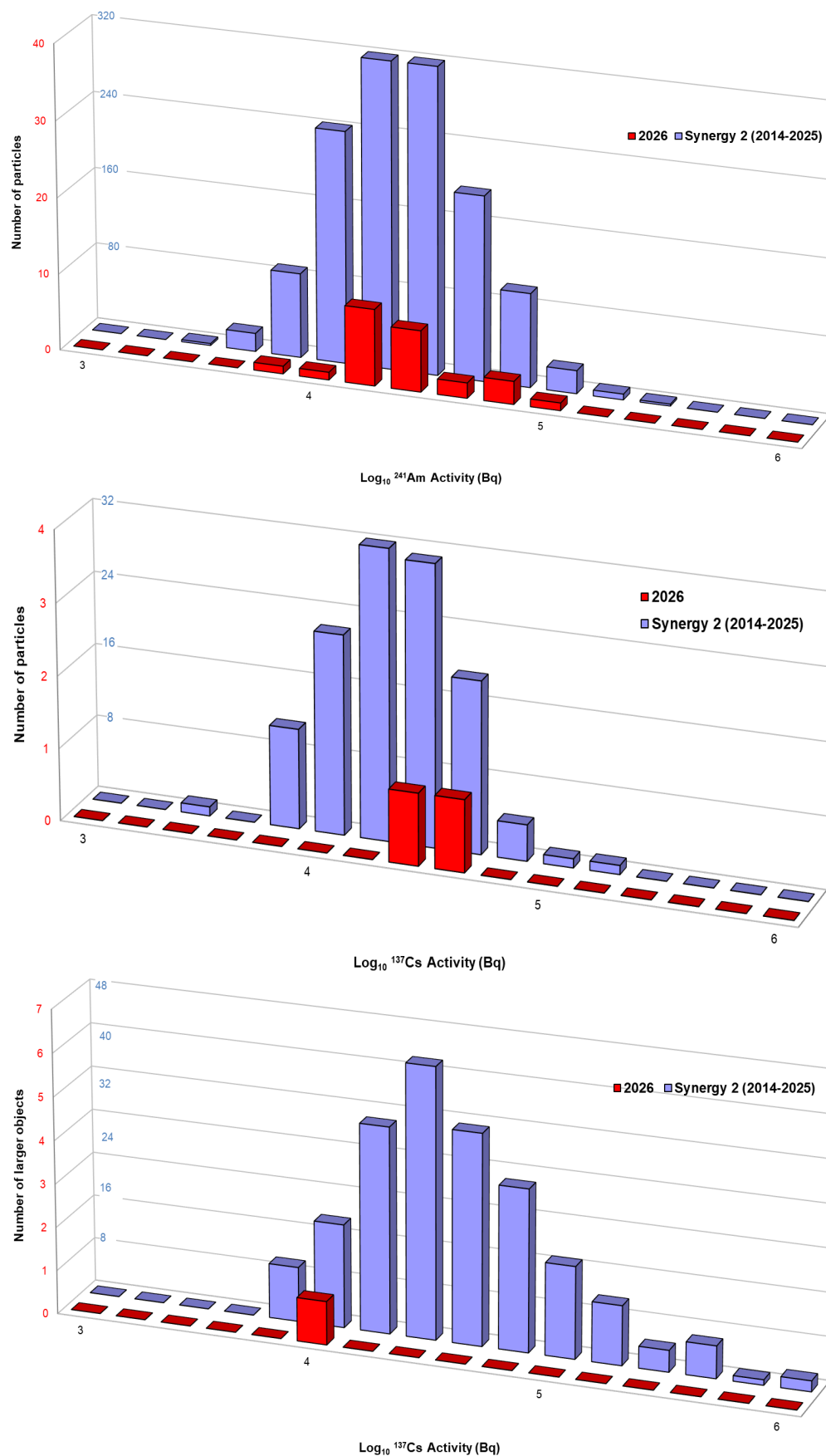


Figure 1: Find rates of alpha-rich particles (upper), beta-rich particles (middle) and beta-rich larger objects (lower) 2022 – 2026. Note that find rates in 2026 are for finds to 10th July 2026 and not the annual rate.



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).