

Code of Practice

Core customer information for household customers

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from
**Southern
Water** 

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About our core customer information

General information

Our core customer information contains details about all the services we offer our household customers, so you can easily find information on:

- our water and wastewater (sewerage) services
- our charges and bills
- how we can help if you need extra support
- what to do if you're unhappy with our service.

About us

We're proud to provide water and wastewater services to more than 4.7 million customers in Kent, Sussex, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and small parts of Wiltshire, Berkshire and Surrey.

You may receive one or both services from us. If another water company provides one of these services, you'll probably receive a separate bill from them – unless we have a joint-billing arrangement in place. For instance, our joint-billing arrangement with South East Water means that our customers receive one bill from South East Water only.

To find out if you're a Southern Water customer, enter your postcode at southernwater.co.uk/your-area.

Other water companies operating in our region include their contact details on their bills – you can find out more about them and where they operate at southernwater.co.uk/area-of-operation.

We're licensed under the Water Industry Act 1991 to provide water and wastewater services, and we're regulated, which protects your interests and strengthens your rights as a customer. Find out more about our regulators at southernwater.co.uk/how-we-are-regulated.

How you can contact us

If you're moving home or you have an enquiry or complaint about your water service, wastewater service or your bill, you can contact our Customer Service team by your preferred method below.

Online

You can now create an online account with us at southernwater.co.uk/your-account. With an online account you can easily:

- pay your bill
- opt for paperless billing
- change your account details
- check your usage history
- tell us you're moving
- set up a Direct Debit
- submit a meter-reading.

Live Chat

Live Chat is available at southernwater.co.uk, Monday to Friday from 7am to 8pm and Saturday from 8:30am to 2pm.

By email

If you have a question about your bill, water supply or wastewater service, please complete our online form at southernwater.co.uk/contact-us.

By phone

If you have a question about your bill, call us on **0330 303 0277**, Monday to Friday from 8am to 7pm and Saturday from 8:30am to 2pm.

You can also call our 24 hour automated line on **0330 303 1263** to pay your bill, tell us you're moving house, or apply for a Direct Debit or a payment card.

If you're struggling to pay your bill, we're here to help and have a range of schemes and tariffs available. Call us **Freephone** on **0800 027 0363**, Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

Emergencies

If there's a problem with your water supply or wastewater services, you can call us 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on **0330 303 0368**.

Write to us

Southern Water, PO Box 564, Darlington, DL1 9ZG.

Our rights of entry

Under certain circumstances, we have the right to enter properties and land. This is usually so that we can investigate compliance with the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999 (WSR 1999) or take samples to check water quality.

We'll always call at a reasonable time and give you appropriate notice. We'll contact you 24 hours before investigating regulatory compliance or monitoring water quality. In all other cases, we'll give seven days' notice. If we've not given you appropriate notice, you can refuse entry unless there's an emergency.

Crime prevention

All of our employees carry Southern Water photo identity cards. Always ask to see it if you're not sure about the person knocking at your door.

Before you answer the door be **AWARE**:

- Attach your door chain before opening the door to strangers.
- Water company employees always carry identification.
- Always look for a company uniform or vehicle displaying a logo.
- Remember, if you're unsure, keep them out and call us on **0330 303 0368** (24/7).
- Employees of Southern Water will always be happy to wait.

Your water services

We supply 563 million litres of water a day through 13,959 km of water mains to 2.6 million customers across Kent, Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. We take nearly 70% of the water we supply from underground sources – the rest comes from above ground sources, such as rivers or reservoirs

This section is about:

- Your water's quality
- Saving water
- What happens when we have to temporarily turn your water off
- Drought and water restrictions
- Water pressure and flow
- Who is responsible for pipes in and around your home
- Finding and fixing leaks
- Requesting new connections to our water mains

In an emergency, call our 24-hour customer service team on **0330 303 0368**.

To report a leak call our 24-hour leak line on **0800 820 999** or complete our online form at southernwater.co.uk/report-a-leak.

Drinking water quality

All water we supply is high quality. The chemical and bacteriological quality of water is specified in regulations issued by the Secretary of State, based on European Union Directives. We must supply water that complies with these regulations. To find out more about our water quality, please visit southernwater.co.uk/drinking-water-quality.

We must regularly sample and test the water we supply to you to comply with these regulations. If we receive a complaint and take a sample of your tap water, we'll always give you details of our analysis and the required water quality standards. You can view a water quality report for your area using the map at southernwater.co.uk/about-your-water. Alternatively, you can request a copy by contacting service enquiries on **0330 303 0368**.

The Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) conducts a thorough audit of our sampling and test records each year. It also checks that we've responded properly to customers' complaints on water quality. More information about the DWI is available at dwi.gov.uk.

Quality problems with your water supply

Please note that the following circumstances are rare. If we have any concerns over the quality of water supplied, we may ask you to boil your water before using it.

In very rare circumstances, we may advise you not to drink the water. If this becomes necessary, we'll notify you by post or through the local media and arrange for an alternative water supply to be made available until the problem has been dealt with. If you believe your water has become unfit to

drink, contact us immediately on **0330 303 0368** (24 hours a day). Don't drink the water until you've spoken to us.

Find out more about our guarantees around water quality at southernwater.co.uk/our-story/guaranteed-standards-of-service.

Lead pipes

Lead is bad for our health and can get into drinking water it has been in contact with for an extended period, such as overnight.

None of our water mains are made of lead, and water leaving our supply works doesn't contain lead. But some older properties built before 1970 may still have lead supply pipes and internal plumbing. We'll tell you if we find an increase in lead concentration in the water from your kitchen tap as part of our routine testing or at your request.

We must also tell your local environmental health officer. If the communication pipe serving your property is made of lead, we'll replace it free of charge. The householder/property owner is responsible for replacing the supply pipe and any internal lead pipes. Your local council may have grants available to help you pay for the replacement of lead pipes.

For more information about lead please visit southernwater.co.uk/lead-plumbing.

Saving water

We're required to provide a continuous supply of water for your household needs – drinking, washing, cooking, heating and sanitation – and for outside use, such as watering the garden and washing the car. We aim to ensure that, in normal circumstances, you may use a hosepipe if you wish. See below for information on temporary water use restrictions during times of drought.

We operate in an area that's seriously water-stressed. In order to help conserve available water supplies, we've installed water meters at most household properties in our water supply area. We strive to make customers aware of the importance of using water wisely and the impact this can have on their metered bills.

Due to individual supply arrangements, fitting a meter at every property is not possible. In these cases, we'll provide an assessed metered charge based on the number of bedrooms in your property. For further information, visit southernwater.co.uk/water-meters.

Drought and restrictions on water use

Our water supply sources are designed to standards that provide water reliably to meet normal demand under drought conditions.

Temporary Use Bans

During a drought, we may have to restrict the use of hosepipes for specific activities by imposing Temporary Use Bans (TUBs) to conserve water supplies so everyone continues to receive enough for their essential needs. You may still water your garden using watering cans and buckets.

If we do have to introduce TUBs, this will apply to all household customers within the affected water resource area whether they have a water meter or not.

We aim to ensure TUBs are kept to a minimum by reducing leakage from the distribution system and developing new water sources to meet the growth in demand. We've also invested heavily in large water transfer pipelines linking our supply areas so water can be moved around. Where we need to impose restrictions, we'll ensure all affected customers are informed about when and how restrictions will be applied and when they'll be lifted.

Where we prohibit one or more specified uses of water for a temporary period under section 76 of the 1991 Act charges levied wholly and exclusively in respect of such prohibited uses will be waived for the period of the ban.

It means that we don't offer rebates during a temporary use ban, as we don't charge customers for using a hosepipe.

If your water supply is interrupted

Sometimes, we have to interrupt the water supply to carry out essential maintenance work to our network. Normally, we'll try to let you know when your water will be cut off and when it will be restored. Occasionally, in an emergency, this may not be possible.

If you find your water has been cut off, visit [southernwater.co.uk](https://www.southernwater.co.uk) for updates or call **0330 303 0368** for further information. If the interruption lasts for more than 24 hours, we're required to provide an alternative water supply. See our guarantees around interruptions at [southernwater.co.uk/our-story/guaranteed-standards-of-service](https://www.southernwater.co.uk/our-story/guaranteed-standards-of-service).

As part of our commitment to reduce wastage from the distribution system, we carry out leakage checks at night. If we're making checks in your area, your supply may be interrupted for up to 45 minutes between 1am and 4am. Because the disruption is slight, we do not normally warn customers in advance. However, if you regularly require a water supply between these hours and you believe an interruption would cause you problems, please contact service enquiries on **0330 303 0368**.

Water pressure

We must supply water at a pressure that ensures it reaches the top of every building, unless this is higher than it will flow by gravity from our service reservoir.

To achieve this, we aim to supply water at the stop tap on the boundary of your property at a minimum pressure of 10 metres head. This gives a minimum flow from a ground-floor tap of nine litres per minute, equivalent to filling a one-gallon bucket in 30 seconds.

In practice, we aim to do better than this. Sometimes lower pressure can occur, but this should not be for more than one hour in 24. If the pressure falls below seven metres static head for more than one hour, on more than one occasion in any 28-day period, we guarantee to pay £25 (see [southernwater.co.uk/our-story/guaranteed-standards-of-service](https://www.southernwater.co.uk/our-story/guaranteed-standards-of-service)).

Pressure and flow are affected by several factors:

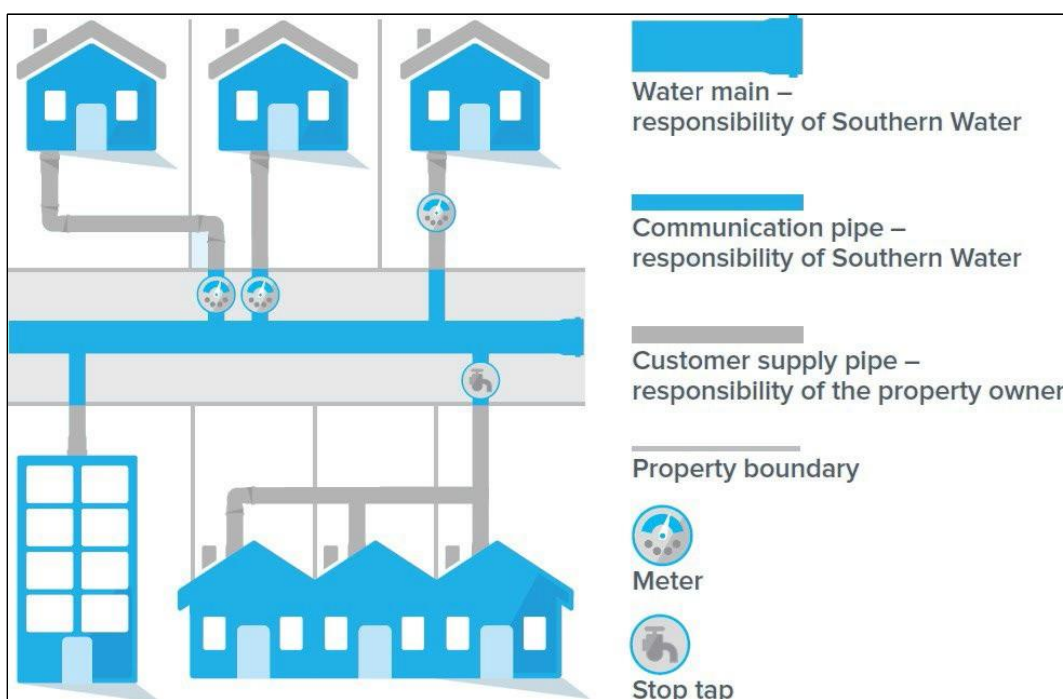
- The height of your property in relation to our water main and our service reservoir
- The condition of your private supply pipe
- If the stop tap is not turned on sufficiently
- Whether your property shares a supply pipe with any other property
- Peak demand conditions

If you think your water pressure is too low, contact service enquiries on **0330 303 0368**. We'll investigate the cause free of charge and advise what action can be taken.

Water pipes

Ownership and responsibility

We own and maintain the water mains that carry water to homes and businesses. Your property is connected to our water main by a service pipe. Responsibility for these underground pipes is split between you and us as shown in the following diagram:



You're legally responsible for the section of pipe from the boundary of the public highway to your property – this is called the supply pipe. You may share the supply pipe with other people and this means you also share responsibility for leaks with any neighbours supplied by the same pipe.

We're responsible for the section between the water main and the boundary of your property – frequently the front garden wall or fence. This is called the communication pipe and usually incorporates our stop tap box, which is located in the pavement or verge. This stop tap is used for turning off the mains water supply. This is often where a water meter is located.

You are responsible for keeping your supply pipe in good order, even when it runs under other properties before reaching yours. Most properties have a separate stop tap where the supply pipe enters the building. You're advised to locate and test this stop tap to ensure it can be shut in an emergency. This is particularly important before any planned works you're undertaking inside your property (e.g. a bathroom or kitchen replacement). An approved plumber should check this for you and be competent to repair or replace the stop tap, if required. If we need to send a member of our team to check your external stop tap and carry out follow-on work to make your external stop tap operable, this may delay your planned work (see the section on leaks for more on how we might be able to help).

Unfortunately, not all supply arrangements are this simple. You may share a communication pipe with one or more of your neighbours. This length of pipe is our responsibility, but the supply pipes connected to it are the responsibility of the customers sharing the supply.

Sometimes, customers find shared supplies inadequate. We'll lay a separate communication pipe free of charge from our main to the street boundary if the following conditions apply:

- The supply fails to meet the flow and pressure criteria.
- Lead is present.
- The supply is being compromised by excessive leaks.

In all cases, the extent of our work will be limited to the provision of a separate communication pipe and/or boundary box. You'll be required to separate all private pipework at your cost. If you wish to take advantage of this offer, call us on **0330 303 0368**.

We prefer for each individual property to have a separate supply pipe. We may have to ask you to provide a separate supply pipe in the following circumstances:

- The shared supply pipe has become defective or insufficient as to need replacement.
- New or converted properties are connected to it.
- There's been interference with a customer's supply.
- Charges are outstanding.

In these cases, you'll need to provide the separate supply pipe yourself or bear the cost of the work undertaken. If you dispute our requirement for the supply pipe to be separated, the matter can be referred to Ofwat for determination.

If you're buying a property, make sure your solicitor checks the arrangements for the water supply and charges, particularly if the property is jointly supplied or the pipe crosses someone else's property. New properties that we supply should have a separate service pipe, even if they are flats formed from the conversion of an existing building.

Our pipe-laying responsibilities

We may want to lay or work on a pipe in land that you own or occupy. We have statutory powers to do this and have rights of entry to the land to lay and maintain the pipe. We'll always try to fit in with owners' or occupiers' reasonable requirements and act in accordance with our Code of Practice for the Exercise of Pipe-Laying Powers, available online at [southernwater.co.uk/Media/Default/PDFs/CodePracPipeLaying.pdf](https://www.southernwater.co.uk/Media/Default/PDFs/CodePracPipeLaying.pdf).



Leaks

We're committed to ensuring water resources are used efficiently. We have a legal duty to promote water efficiency and have a water efficiency programme, as described in our Water Resources Management Plan, available at southernwater.co.uk/water-resources-plan.

Reducing water loss, repairing leaks on our mains and preventing bursts are a top priority for us. We have specialist teams working day and night to check for hidden leaks in our underground pipes. If water is leaking from your outside stop tap, the water meter or the joints around the meter, we're responsible for putting this right. You can help us by reporting any such leaks, 24-hours a day on **0800 820 999**.

We aim to repair visible leaks as soon as possible. Those reported during a working day will be attended and inspected by the end of the next working day. Leaks reported out of normal working hours will be attended within the next two working days. We aim to repair 80% of leaks within five days – sooner if the leak is severe.

If another company supplies your water

If your water is supplied by another company, you should contact them about any suspected or obvious leaks.

If your water supplier makes an adjustment to your water charges, they'll send us details about the adjustment. You may be entitled to a bill adjustment for wastewater charges once we've received details from your water supplier. We'll review the circumstances and, where appropriate, make an adjustment. In some circumstances, such as the water from an obvious or prolonged leak returning to the public sewer, we may write to you and explain that our charges remain payable.

Leaks on pipes owned by customers

This section sets out how we deal with water leaks at household and mixed-use premises. It explains who is responsible for dealing with water leaks and what we'll do if a leak is found. Water leaks are a waste of a precious resource and, if left to run, may cause damage to your property. The cost of repairing damage caused by a long-running leak is always far greater than dealing with it promptly.

The **Water pipes** section explains that the property owner is responsible for the supply pipe and internal fittings, so any repair or maintenance of these rests with them. We understand that finding and fixing a leak on underground pipework is a daunting prospect for many customers.

While we provide some help with this, we recommend that you consider arranging suitable cover through your household insurance or by taking out a specialist scheme that covers all types of plumbing repairs. If maintenance is required on your pipework or you're arranging an emergency repair, we recommend that you always hire a qualified plumber. This will ensure that all water regulations are met.

You can find a local, qualified plumber through the WaterSafe scheme – visit watersafe.org.uk or call **0333 207 9030**. Customers can take some basic steps to help prevent leaks, such as protecting pipes with insulation in winter – find out more at southernwater.co.uk/prepare-for-winter.

Where the supply pipe is in poor condition, and therefore at risk of leaking again, replacing the whole pipe (relay) rather than repair may be advisable. We can help, call us on **0330 303 0368**.



Spotting a leak

Apart from the visible signs, such as water bubbling out of the ground or a very damp patch in your garden on a dry day, other ways to check for a leak can be used. If your water supply is metered, you can carry out this simple check.

Take a reading from the meter, then either turn off the supply indoors or make sure you've no taps or water-using appliances (e.g. washing machine or dishwasher) running. After one hour, take another meter reading. If the reading is higher, you probably have a leak. Depending on where the leak is, you may also notice a drop in pressure at peak demand or a slight hissing noise, particularly at night when it's quiet. To find out how you can test for a leak, visit southernwater.co.uk/testing-for-a-leak or call us on **0330 303 0277**.

Leak detection service

Where a leak is suspected but not visible because it's below ground, we offer a free leak detection service, lasting up to one hour. Though our equipment is very effective, we can't guarantee we'll find the exact source of the leak. We'll ensure that we update you with the results of our detection work. If you require any of these services or would like further information, please call us on **0330 303 0277**.

Responsibilities for leaks

Once the leak has been found, you (or the property owner, if you're a tenant) should arrange to have the leak repaired as soon as possible. Unless you make the repair within 30 days, you won't be able to claim the full leakage allowance.

If your insurance doesn't specify a particular contractor, you should get the work done by a reputable contractor of your choice. Websites such as checkatrade.com or watersafe.org.uk can help you find a qualified plumber. Where your supply pipe runs under someone else's private land, you're still responsible for fixing it and you'll need to obtain agreement to dig on their land. If you share your supply pipe with one or more other properties, you'll have shared liability for the repair.

We have a legal duty to prevent loss of water from our supply system, so if you (or the owner) refuse to repair a leak or prevent us from carrying out a free repair, we may be forced to take the following action:

- Repair the leak and send you a bill for the work carried out.
- Consider legal proceedings under Section 75 of the Water Industry Act 1991 (see legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1991/56/section/75).
- As a final action, we reserve the right to disconnect the water supply.

Checking for leaks when we fit a new meter

When we fit a meter, we check whether the supply pipe has any leakage. If a leak is detected and can be repaired without further excavation at the time, it will be done at our expense.

If a leak is detected that can't be repaired without further excavation, we'll let you know about the leak and help you, where possible, through the process of repair.

Leakage allowance – adjustments to your bill

If you have a water meter, your bills will be based on the volume of water the meter records – including any water wasted or lost through leaks from your pipework. If you're paying metered

charges and have had a leak, we'll make a one-time adjustment to both water supply and wastewater charges to reflect the extra amount of water recorded because of the leak, once it has been repaired. We normally recalculate your metered charges based on past usage. Where there's no record of past usage, the adjustment will be based on two readings taken over a period of time.

If this isn't possible, an estimate will be based upon the number of people using the supply. Charges will normally be adjusted to cover the period when the supply was leaking. For those customers who haven't previously received a bill, the recalculated charges will be backdated to the beginning of the billing period.

There will be no adjustment if any of the following applies:

- Another leak occurs after an adjustment for an earlier leak.
- You (or someone else living with you) caused the leak through negligence.
- You knew, or could reasonably be expected to have known, that there was a leak and you failed to repair it or tell us about it.
- The leak occurred because of faulty pipes or fittings inside your home.
- You did not repair the leak within a reasonable period (30 days for full allowance, up to 90 days for partial allowance).

If you believe you may be entitled to a bill adjustment after making repairs, contact us within three months of receiving the bill in question. Our contact details are at the start of this section, shown on our bills and online at southernwater.co.uk/do-it-online.

Mains records

We maintain digital records of the location of our water infrastructure. Individual developers may wish to view these records before beginning construction work. The records are available for inspection, free of charge, during working hours. Please call **0330 303 0276** or email searches@southernwater.co.uk to make an appointment and to discuss the most convenient office for you to visit.

Electrical earthing

Safe earthing of electrical appliances in your house is your responsibility and your water service pipe should not be used for earthing your household electrical installation. Unfortunately, many houses, particularly those built before 1966, still rely on the water pipe as an earth.

If your house is one of these, please remember that the increasing use of plastic water pipes reduces the effectiveness of your water pipe as an earth. Where we have carried out work on your communication pipe, we will notify you, advising you of the possible effect on your electrical earthing. We also strongly advise you to have your electrical system tested as soon as possible, and brought up to standard if found to be defective. You should consult your electricity supply company for advice on electrical earthing.

New water connections

If you're building a new home, or your existing home isn't connected to our water main, we're required to connect your property at your request, subject to terms and conditions. We'll provide the connection into the main and the communication pipe from the main to the external stop tap. However, you're required to pay for this work to be carried out.

You're not allowed to make the connection into our main yourself and we must lay any part of your supply pipe that involves digging up the public highway. For a new or altered connection, call our service enquiries line on **0330 303 0119** or for more information visit southernwater.co.uk/property-and-developers.

All new properties must have a separate communication pipe and a water meter. Once we've agreed to provide a new connection and payment has been received, where we can, we'll:

- make the connection as soon as possible once the supply pipe is laid and within 21 days
- make the connection within 14 days of you contacting us if the whole pipe from the property to our water main is already laid.

If we fail to connect your house within the timeframe stated above and without a valid reason, we may be liable to you for loss or damage caused.

New connection costs

Costs and charges are payable for new connections. These include:

- The cost of making the connection to the main.
- The cost of providing and laying our communication pipe together with a charge for installing a meter.
- An infrastructure charge which contributes to the cost of local reinforcement to the distribution system. The maximum amount we can charge is fixed by our licence and is adjusted annually in line with the Retail Price Index. It's payable for newly-connected premises. A separate infrastructure charge is payable for any connection to the sewerage system.
- Where a site was previously developed and there's been a supply to the site within the previous five years, there may be a credit applied to the infrastructure charges. These credits will be calculated based on the information provided on the Application for New Connection Estimate form, available at southernwater.co.uk/water-main-connections.

For further information about these costs and charges call service enquiries on **0330 303 0119**.

If we can't decide whether our connection costs were incurred reasonably, the issue can be referred to Ofwat for determination. A dispute over the terms of a condition that we've imposed for the purposes of metering can be referred to arbitration or, if we can't agree on an arbitrator, this can be determined by Ofwat. For more information, see our section about disputes determined by Ofwat.

New water mains

If you need a connection to an existing water main, you must lay or extend the supply pipe to a point close to that main. Alternatively, if your property is some distance away and, particularly if there are other properties involved, you may prefer us to lay an extension to the existing main



along public highways nearer to your property. This would mean you have a shorter length of private supply pipe for which you remain responsible. You can ask us to do this whether you're the owner or the occupier of your property. However, you must meet or underwrite the costs of a new water main. This means you will have to pay any difference between the income we receive from charges for water supplied from the main and our reasonable costs in providing the main.

You may choose to pay the amount as a lump sum or by instalments over 12 years. We'll require a deposit from you before beginning the work. We must pay interest on any monies we hold for longer than three months, at a rate set by Ofwat.

We have to provide the main within three months of your request. If we break this deadline and you suffer loss or damage as a result, you may have a legal claim against us. If we can't agree the amount you need to pay or the amount of security you should give, either of us can refer the matter to Ofwat. In some circumstances your local council may be prepared to request a water main on your behalf.

For more information or to arrange for a quote, please visit southernwater.co.uk/water-main-connections or contact us on **0330 303 0119**.

Self-lay water mains

We'll also consider proposals from developers or their agents for new water mains and services for later management by us. This applies to design, installation and commissioning of new water mains and services to supply new or existing developments with water.

When considering proposals, we'll work to agree the most appropriate arrangements, taking into account statutory responsibilities, those elements of work the developer wishes to undertake directly and any other practical considerations. Once we take over responsibility of the main, you'll receive an asset payment from us. This payment will be the present value of the income we expect to get from the properties connected to the main over the next 12 years. This figure is agreed before work begins. Further information is available at southernwater.co.uk/self-lay.

Protecting water against contamination and using approved plumbers

Water Supply Regulations are designed to prevent potable water being contaminated. They also prevent waste, undue consumption, misuse and interference with water meters. A short explanation of the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999 (WSR 1999) is available from our service enquiries team – please call **0330 303 0368**.

- All plumbing work carried out at your property needs to comply with the regulations.
- All new materials or equipment installed need to comply with the regulations. The Water Regulations Advisory Scheme publishes a list of fittings that comply with these requirements at wrasapprovals.co.uk/approvals-directory.
- You should specify to any contractor you employ that all work should be undertaken in accordance with the regulations. Ideally, you should use a contractor who is a member of the Water Industry Approved Plumber Scheme (WIAPS) – see waterregsuk.co.uk/wiaps.
- If new or modified plumbing doesn't comply with our regulations, this may be a criminal offence and we'll require you to put it right. In an emergency, we can disconnect your supply. If you use a plumber who is a member of WIAPS, they will be responsible for any such criminal liability.

Remember, the Water Fittings Regulations are made to protect the quality of the water we supply and are important to ensure the water supply does not become contaminated with potential harm to health.

Your wastewater services

We own and operate the public sewers, which take wastewater from your drains to wastewater treatment works for treatment and disposal. We do this in accordance with legal standards set and monitored by the Department for Environment, Foods and Rural Affairs. The Environment Agency monitors our compliance with environmental legislation and enters its results in a public register.

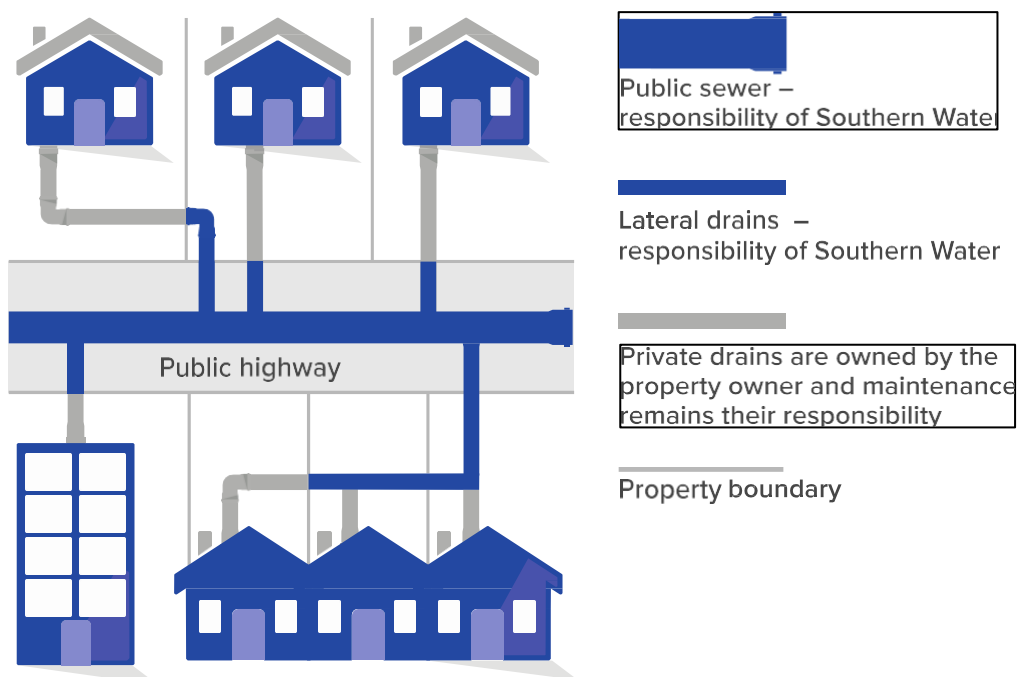
This section is about:

- The difference between drains, sewers and gullies
- Who is responsible for what
- Blockages and preventing sewer flooding
- Adopted sewers and sewer connections
- New sewers, smells and pumping stations

For any problems with the public sewer system, contact us on **0330 303 0368**.

The difference between drains, sewers and highway gullies

- Drains carry foul sewage, wastewater or rainfall from a single property – those within the boundary of your property are your responsibility.
- Lateral drains are drains that lay outside of your property boundary and connect with the public sewer – we are responsible for these.
- Sewers carry sewage, wastewater and rainfall from more than one property – we are responsible for these.
- Highway gullies or drains remove rainwater from roads and pavements – the local highway authority is responsible for clearing these.



Sewer ownership and responsibilities

Since October 2011, we've been responsible for maintaining public sewers (pipes serving two or more properties) and lateral drains (the section of a drain that serves only a single property but is outside the boundaries of the property).

As the responsibility was transferred to water companies fairly recently, private sewers and lateral drains may not show on our maps until they have been surveyed. Our sewer records are available for inspection, free of charge, at local council offices. In addition, extracts can be obtained through the post, for a small fee. Contact our service enquiries team on **0330 303 0368**.

Types of sewers

- **Surface water sewers** carry rainwater from roofs and hardstandings directly into rivers and the sea.
- **Foul sewers** carry lavatory waste and used water from cooking, cleaning and washing to wastewater treatment works.
- **Combined sewers** carry the same as the two points above to a wastewater treatment works.
- **Lateral drains** carry foul sewage or surface water from the boundary of your property to the main sewer.

Most public sewers are beneath roads or public open spaces, but some run through private gardens and we have a right of access to maintain, repair or replace them. We also have legal protection against anyone building over or near to our sewers.

If we need to lay or maintain pipes on your land, we'll observe our **Code of Practice for the Exercise of Pipe-Laying Powers**. Copies of the code will be sent with any notice about using these powers. If this causes a dispute, the outcome will be determined by our regulator Ofwat – for more information, see our section about **disputes determined by Ofwat**.

Household customers are responsible for all drains within the property boundary which serve their property. If you're buying a property that is connected to a sewer, make sure that your solicitor asks whether your drain or private sewer connects to the public sewer and where. You'll be responsible for the maintenance, repair or replacement of the privately-owned length and you may want to check its condition.

Sewer blockages and preventing sewer flooding

We're responsible for clearing any blockages in public sewers and lateral drains, and we use specialist contractors to do this. If in doubt about whether a sewer is public or private, please contact us and we'll provide you with an extract from our sewer records, which will show the public sewers in your area. We'll arrange to have public sewers cleared promptly if we're notified of a blockage. If our sewer crews identify that the blockage is not our responsibility – for example, because it's in a private drain – then we'll refer you to a private contractor to clear the blockage.

We're not responsible for clearing blockages in private drains (pipes serving only your property, and within the boundaries of your property) and you need to pay any contractors you call in to unblock them.

Public sewers are designed with enough capacity to protect homes from the risk of flooding. However, flooding from sewers can happen for a variety of reasons – for example, following blockages, collapses, vandalism or exceptional weather. Useful tips about what you should and shouldn't put down your sinks and toilets are available at [southernwater.co.uk/keep-it-clear](https://www.southernwater.co.uk/keep-it-clear).

If you experience internal or external flooding, please contact our service enquiries team on **0330 303 0368** at any time. All customers are advised to maintain insurance cover against loss or damage to their buildings and contents as a result of flooding.

If wastewater from one of our sewers enters your building, you're entitled to an automatic payment or credit equal to the annual wastewater charge for the current year (subject to a minimum of £150 and maximum of £1,000) for each event.

In the event of external flooding, you're entitled to a payment or credit equivalent to half of your wastewater charges (£75 minimum to a maximum of £500). You need to claim the payment within three months of the incident. Download a claim form at [southernwater.co.uk/media/default/PDFs/ExternalFlooding_ClaimForm.pdf](https://www.southernwater.co.uk/media/default/PDFs/ExternalFlooding_ClaimForm.pdf).

These payments won't apply if flooding is caused by exceptional weather, industrial action, your own actions or any defect, inadequacy or blockage in your drains or private sewers. If you suffer losses as a result of flooding from a sewer, contact your insurance company in the first instance.

Southern Water isn't responsible for the damage that flooding may cause, but we'll assist with clearing up after an incident to help you get things back to normal. This assistance will be provided as part of the first response after your call to report the flooding. However, if we're experiencing a high volume of incidents, this assistance may be delayed.

See the section about our guarantees for the conditions relating to sewer flooding.

Adopted sewers

Section 42 of the Flood and Water Management Act requires all new sewers and lateral drains to be designed and constructed to the Mandatory Build Standard (published before this legislation).

Before making a connection to the sewerage system, you need approval from us (a **Section 106 agreement**). You'll also need to have approval of the design of the proposed works and an agreement from us to adopt your sewers once they have been built (a **Section 104 agreement**).

If you want to make a connection to the sewerage system, whether for a single house or development site, contact us as soon as possible.

Sewers for Adoption, published by WRc, sets out in more detail the requirements for sewer design and is currently being revised to take into account these legislative changes. A Sewers for Adoption package containing guidance notes and an application form can be downloaded from [southernwater.co.uk/regulations-services/sewer-adoptions](https://www.southernwater.co.uk/regulations-services/sewer-adoptions) or is available from our Customer Service centre on **0330 303 0368**.

We're not responsible for sewers that haven't been adopted. If you think that we've imposed unreasonable conditions for adoption, you can appeal to Ofwat – for more information, see our section about **disputes determined by Ofwat**.

New connections to the public sewer

As the owner or occupier of your property, you're entitled to have a drain or private sewer connected to an appropriate public sewer. Charges for this are outlined in the next section. You need to give us notice if you want to do this – contact us on **0330 303 0119** or visit southernwater.co.uk/new-sewer-connection for a sewer connection application pack, which details the procedure to follow. Please take the below into consideration as part of your application:

- The construction details should be in accordance with the specification supplied in the application pack.
- Once we've received your notice, we'll tell you within 21 days if your proposals are acceptable. No connection should be attempted within this period without our specific agreement.
- We may choose to carry out the connection works ourselves. If this is the case, we'll tell you within 14 days of receipt of the completed application form.
- If we're not making the connection ourselves, once you've received approval from us, we ask that you give us 48 hours' notice of your intention to start the work.
- Any person making an illegal connection into a public sewer is committing an offence and may be liable to a fine. Also, we can disconnect the drain or sewer and recover the costs of doing so.
- If we find a sewer has been wrongly connected, e.g. a foul water drain connected to a surface water sewer, we'll ask for it to be fixed immediately or disconnected.
- It's also illegal to connect land drains, draining unsurfaced areas, to the public sewers as this can cause flooding to other properties.

New sewer connection payments

Costs and charges are payable to us for connections to the public sewer. What these are for and when they should be paid are as follows:

- If we make the connection ourselves, the estimated cost is payable in advance.
- If we agree to you making the connection, our costs for administration and approval of your proposal are payable in advance.
- An infrastructure charge, which contributes to the cost of providing sewerage systems. The maximum amount we can charge is fixed by our licence and is adjusted annually in line with the Retail Price Index. It's payable for each newly-connected premises.
- If a site was previously developed and a sewer connection has been made to the site within five years, there may be a credit applied to the infrastructure charges. These credits will be calculated based on the information provided on the 'Application for new connection estimate' form available at southernwater.co.uk/new-sewer-connection.

Further information concerning these costs and charges is available from our Customer Service centre. If we can't approve your proposals, estimated costs or any difference in our final costs, the matter can be referred to Ofwat for determination.

If you want to lay a drain or sewer in the public highway, you need to check you have the right to do so by contacting the Highway Authority.

New sewers

If your house is some distance from the nearest public sewer, you may want us to extend the sewerage system nearer to your house – particularly if you have neighbours who also want to connect their properties to main drainage.

Whether you're the owner or the occupier of your house, you can ask us to provide a sewer for you. However, you'll need to meet or underwrite the costs of a new sewer. This means you'll have to pay any difference between the income we receive from charges that relate to the sewer and our reasonable costs in providing the sewer. You may choose to pay a lump sum or pay by instalments over 12 years. We'll ask for a deposit, equal to the discounted aggregated deficit, before beginning the work. We pay interest on monies held for longer than three months, at a rate set by Ofwat.

We normally provide the sewer within six months of the request. However, this may be extended by agreement. If we can't meet this deadline, no extension has been agreed and you sustain loss or damage as a result, you may have a legal claim against us. If we can't agree the amount you should pay or the amount of security you should give, either of us can refer the matter to Ofwat. In some circumstances, your local council may be prepared to make the request on your behalf.

If you want more information on this complex subject, you can find guidance notes and an application form at southernwater.co.uk/new-sewer-connection or call us on **0330 303 0119**.

First time sewerage schemes

Section 101A of the Water Industry Act gives us additional responsibilities for the provision of first-time sewerage, where there is an adverse effect on the environment. This applies to properties not already connected to the sewerage system. Initially you should contact Developer Services at southernwater.co.uk/developers-and-builders-contact-us or call us on **0330 303 0119**.

We'll be able to give you general information about this procedure and send the guidance notes and application forms to you. Under **section 98** of The Water Industry Act 1991, we have a duty to provide a public sewer for domestic purposes, if required to do so by certain people.

Where we provide a public sewer in response to an application under **section 98** or **section 101A**, we may also – under the provisions of **section 101B** and at the request of the person requiring the sewer – provide at the same time one or more lateral drains to connect to the sewer, to be used for drainage for domestic purposes. A lateral drain is the section of pipe connecting the house drainage from the boundary of the property to the public sewer.

If we provide the lateral drain, the person who requested it will be required to pay any costs incurred. We'll adopt laterals provided under this section.

Smells from our sites

Our treatment processes meet the Environment Agency's quality standards. However, you may occasionally experience odours from our sites. Our monitoring devices help us quickly detect issues, but we also rely on your help – please call us on **0330 303 0368** if you notice smells from one of our treatment works.

Pumping stations

Since October 2016, we've been responsible for any eligible private sewer pumping stations. For us to adopt a private sewer pumping station, it must:

- have been built before July 2011
- drain to a Southern Water sewer
- serve more than one property, each within a single curtilage (if it serves only one property, the pumping station must be located outside of the property boundary)
- not be part of a private treatment works, such as a cess pit or septic tank.

If you own a private sewer pumping station or know of one that fits the above criteria, please complete the online form at southernwater.co.uk/information-about-pumping-stations.

Our charges and your bills

This section is about:

- Our charges and how they're calculated
- Unmetered accounts
- Water meters and metered accounts
- About your bill
- Surface water drainage

Our charges

The water industry goes through a thorough price review process every five years, which is led by the industry regulator, Ofwat. The current price review period ends in March 2025. As well as covering the day-to-day running costs of supplying clean drinking water and taking away and treating wastewater, our investment programme since April 2020 has included new schemes to replace water mains, protect water supplies, reduce leakage and improve water quality.

Details of our charges and charging policies are found in our charges guides which are available for free from the Customer Service centre or at southernwater.co.uk/our-charges.

We have standard tariffs for the services we provide in terms of unmetered and metered water supplies and wastewater collection and disposal. VAT is payable only on certain charges and this is detailed on bills, where appropriate. As a household customer, your water services charges are calculated either on:

- an unmetered basis (based on your property's rateable value)
- an assessed rate
- a metered basis, by the volume of water supplied and recorded by a water meter.

Normally, the occupier of the property receiving our services is liable to pay our charges. This applies even if the occupier is a tenant and the tenancy agreement says the landlord will pay our charges. The landlord will only be liable if they agree this with us directly or pay the bills in their name.

It's in your interests to ensure we are notified of changes in occupier. This is particularly important if you've a water meter, as the Water Industry Act 1991 states that you're required to give us at least two working days' advance notice (excluding bank holidays) before you leave your premises so we can obtain a closing reading. If you don't and are unable to provide a final meter reading, you may be held liable for charges beyond the date that you leave the property.

On receipt of your final account, we'll refund any outstanding credit balance within 10 working days of your request or transfer it to your new property, if it's in our area.

If you're a tenant

The person primarily responsible for paying water service charges is the occupier of the property. Unless your landlord has entered into a written agreement with us that they accept responsibility for our charges, then you, as the tenant, must pay the bills.

We're not party to the terms of your tenancy agreement. If you believe water services charges are included in your rent but we've written to you asking for payment, you'll need to ask your landlord to contact us and make payment. However, if your landlord does not pay, we'll have to ask you to. If the bill you've received is for a previous tenant, please contact us so we can send you a correct bill.

If you experience a leak on your supply pipe and live in a property where your landlord is a management company or housing association – or the property is council-owned – your landlord may be responsible for carrying out any repairs. Please contact them immediately if you suspect a problem. Please also let us know, as we may be able to help you with the bill. See our content about leaks in the section 'Your water services':

Landlord TAP

If you're a Landlord, you may benefit from using landlordtap.com – an easy-to-use website that enables all landlords and managing agents of properties in England and Wales to provide water companies with details of those responsible for the payment of water and/or wastewater charges.

Metered accounts

We charge for water supply services and for wastewater services, if we provide them. In both cases, our charges will include:

- a standing charge which is set to recover the costs of servicing each account – for example, the costs of meter reading, billing, cash collection, debt recovery and enquiry handling
- a charge based on the volume of water supplied as recorded by the meter.

Your charges for water supply services will be calculated on the amount of water supplied as recorded on the meter. If the meter is not operating properly or we're unable to read it for some reason, we'll make a reasonable estimate of the amount supplied and calculate your charges on this. If you disagree with the estimate, we'll review any information you can provide about water usage and discuss this with you.

Your charges for wastewater services will be assessed on the amount of clean water supplied, with a fixed reduction of 7.5% for water that hasn't gone to the sewer (for example, outside water use). Services are supplied on a metered basis if:

- a meter has been installed as part of our metering programme
- you've chosen to have a meter installed
- a meter was already installed
- you've made a new connection to our water main
- you wish to use a sprinkler or unattended watering device and haven't yet received a meter under our metering programme
- you've a swimming pool/recreational pool and haven't yet received a meter under our metering programme.

To apply for a meter call **0330 303 1262** or visit southernwater.co.uk/apply-for-meter.

If we can't fit a meter

If installing a meter at your property isn't possible, you'll be given the following options:

- You may make private arrangements for your pipework to be altered to enable us to install a meter. Unfortunately, due to the nature of some individual private supply arrangements, this option may not be available to every customer.
- If you live in a flat within a block and we're unable to meter your individual flat, we may be able to meter the block as a whole. For further information see **Section 8.2** below.
- We can provide an assessed metered charge, which is a fixed charge based on the number of bedrooms in your premises – or, where applicable, on a single-occupancy basis.

Common supplies (flats)

Some blocks of flats or converted houses have elements of shared water supplies, for example:

- outside taps for communal garden watering
- standpipes in garage compounds
- communal header tanks in the attic of the building to feed hot water systems, showers, toilets
- communal laundry facilities.

If, following our initial survey, we establish that this is the case at your property, and you can't sensibly make the necessary alterations to your private pipework, we'll be unable to install a meter to record the entire volume of water supplied to you. However, it may be possible to meter the entire block of flats that you live in, provided that:

- we receive written acceptance from each bill-paying customer
- one person or entity such as a management or residents' association accepts responsibility for payment of the metered charge
- none of the occupiers is currently receiving water services accounts calculated on a metered basis by reference to recorded consumption.

Wasted water and leaks with a meter

If you have a meter, you'll be paying for water leaking from pipes and fittings for which you're responsible. You should ensure they are kept in good order and repair. Please see **Section 3.11** on leakage, which provides details of the safeguards in these circumstances. If you're able, it's in your interest to make frequent check readings of the meter to identify any excessive use so early action can be taken. Advice on leak detection is available from the Customer Service centre and at southernwater.co.uk/leak-detection.

Testing the meter

All meters are tested before they're installed. If you question the accuracy of the meter, we'll carry out an initial accuracy check, free of charge. However, high consumption is usually indicates leakage or waste, rather than a faulty meter.

If you ask for another test and the meter is found to be within the prescribed limits, then we'll ask you to pay a charge of £70 + VAT. The charge is payable before the test is carried out and will be refunded if the meter is found to exceed the prescribed limits.

Tampering with the meter

The meter remains our property. You need to contact our Customer Service centre on **0330 303 0277** to seek permission to do anything that may affect its operation or the accuracy of its measurement.

If you interfere with the meter or carry out work that prevents it registering accurately, you'll be committing an offence and liable to a fine and a fee for putting it right. The regulations enable us to prosecute through the magistrates' court, where a fine of up to £1,000 may be imposed.

Change of occupation or ownership

If the property is changing hands, or the people living there are changing, you need to give us at least two working days' advance notice (excluding bank holidays) so that we can obtain a closing reading. If you fail to do so, you'll still be responsible for metered charges at the property beyond the date you leave. In this situation, your responsibility ends on the earliest of the following dates:

- 28 days after you tell us of your move
- The next routine meter reading date
- The day we're notified of details of the new occupier

For further information, including requests for meter testing, contact the Customer Service centre on **0330 303 0277**.

Unmetered accounts

Historically, water charges have been predominantly unmetered and calculated based on the rateable value of the property.

Rateable values haven't been assessed by the Valuation Office since 1990 and all new properties have had water meters fitted since then. While water companies are permitted to continue using this outdated method of charging, water companies in the South East of England are increasingly switching their customers over to metered charging.

Assessed charges

Since 2010, we've introduced a programme to fit water meters at household properties in our water supply area. Where metering is not possible because of the configuration of the private pipework, our fixed rate assessed tariff is employed as the method of charge. This charge is based on the number of bedrooms in the customer's home, which is used to estimate the number of people who live there.

Using assumptions about typical water consumption per person for metered customers, assessed charges are set by applying our metered tariff to the total assessed consumption at the property. A single occupier discount is also available on this tariff.

A relatively small number of our customers receive charges based on rateable value. The circumstances are:

- customers that live in an area where the water supply is provided by another water company and that company hasn't yet decided to fit water meters

- the property is in our water supply area and hasn't yet been switched to a metered water supply or an assessed charge.

For rateable value based charges, we make separate charges for water supply services and for wastewater services, if we provide them. In both cases charges include:

- a standing charge, which is set to recover the costs of servicing each account – for example, the costs of meter reading, billing, cash collection, debt recovery and enquiry handling
- a charge calculated on the rateable value of the premises as at 31 March 1990 (subject to a minimum charge).

If your property doesn't have a rateable value and we're unable to fit a water meter, we'll apply an assessed metered charge based on the number of bedrooms in your premises, or on single occupancy, instead of direct usage.

If your property is connected to a public sewer for the drainage of surface water only, you'll also have to pay a fixed charge for the surface water drainage.

Where water is used for any other purpose specified by us (garages, pools or troughs), we'll fix a charge for that purpose.

Surface water rebate

Our full sewerage standing charge is made up of different elements. These are wastewater, surface water and highway drainage. For the majority of our customers, the rain that falls on to roofs, paths and driveways enters the public sewer and is treated by us. If surface water doesn't drain from your property into the sewerage system but into soakaways – a private surface water drain or sewer that doesn't enter the public sewerage system – then you're entitled to a rebate.

To request a rebate please call our 24-hour message line on **0330 303 1266** or complete and submit our online form at southernwater.co.uk/surface-water-rebate-form. Rebates will be backdated to 1 April 2015

The highway drainage element covers the cost of highway water run-off. It's payable by all customers who benefit from a connection to the public sewerage system.

Paying for your water and wastewater

You can pay our charges in a variety of ways – these are detailed on our bills and below:

- **Your Account** – manage your water account online at southernwater.co.uk/your-account. You can set up a Direct Debit or payment card with just a few clicks. Alternatively, you can pay by debit/credit card.
- **Direct Debit** – the easiest way to pay. Setup a Direct Debit online, over the phone, or we can send you a form to complete and return.
- **Debit or credit card** – pay by credit or debit card over the phone on 0330 303 0277. You can also use our 24-hour automated service on 0330 303 1263.
- **Online banking** – please quote the 13 digits of your payment reference without any spaces. Our bank sort code is 40-02-50 and our bank account number is 91426907.



- **At any Post Office** – fill in the payment slip and take it, with your payment card, to any Post Office where you can pay free of charge.
- **Cash or cheque payment at the bank** – while no extra fee is charged if you pay at any Post Office branch, if you pay at a bank, you may be charged a small fee for each payment.
- **By post** – complete and tear off the payment slip on your bill and send it with your cheque to: Southern Water, PO Box 564, Darlington, DL1 9ZG.
- **By standing order** – please ensure you quote your payment reference as indicated on your bill (it should be 13 digits without any spaces). Our bank sort code is 40-02-50 and our bank account number is 91426907. Please note, you have to tell your bank every time any change needs to be made to the payment amount.
- **PayPoint** – for customers who prefer to pay locally. You'll need to take your payment card or your bill to the local PayPoint outlet with the cash to make a payment. You'll receive a receipt for the payment, which must be retained as proof of payment.
- **By payment card** – this can be used free of charge at any Post Office or PayPoint outlets in local shops for weekly, fortnightly or monthly payments.

We know there are many demands on household budgets. Organising your budget and finding money to pay bills can sometimes be difficult. However, water and wastewater bills must be paid.

Customer care is a top priority for us. The 'Help if you're struggling to pay your bill' section explains how we can help if you're experiencing financial difficulties. We'll always try to be flexible in our approach and are committed to doing everything possible to reach an agreement which you'll be happy with.

Don't pay more than you have to

If you don't pay your charges when they're due or we can't come to a satisfactory payment arrangement with you, the whole amount becomes due. As a last resort, we may employ the services of an external debt collection agency or take you to court. This will involve you paying extra costs because you'll also have to pay an administration fee or court fees and our solicitor's costs. We prefer to avoid this option but, like all businesses, we need our customers to pay for the services they receive.

Paying for unmetered accounts

Our charges are calculated for the year from 1 April and are payable on that date. However, payment can be made by:

- two instalments, on 1 April and 1 October, which may be paid by Direct Debit
- prior arrangement in 12 monthly instalments through the year. This option is available to all household customers, on request.

If any instalment is not paid by the date due, we can ask for the charges to be paid in full. We'll only withdraw instalment arrangements as a last resort and, therefore, urge you to contact us immediately if you are worried about missing a payment.

Paying for metered accounts

We aim to read your meter every year and send you a bill based on this reading. If we're unable to take a reading, the bill will be based on an estimate of how much water you've used. You may also give us a reading. You'll receive your bill soon afterwards and it'll be due for payment. Alternatively, you can make monthly budget plan payments.



If you dispute the bill

If you don't believe that you're responsible for paying the bill, or you disagree with the amount, you must tell us straight away. Call us on 0330 303 0277 for help and advice.

No further action will be taken while we look into the matter. We may need to ask you to provide more information to support your dispute. If, after investigation, we still believe the bill is due, we'll tell you why and you will either have to pay the charges in full or agree a payment plan with us.

If you're not happy with our decision, you can use our established complaint procedure and a senior manager or director may be involved to investigate. Your complaint can also be referred to the **Consumer Council for Water (CCW)**. Please let us know if you've contacted CCW so we can make sure we don't take further recovery action while you receive advice from CCW.

If you don't keep to the agreement or pay the bill

If you don't pay your bill or keep to a payment arrangement we've agreed with you, we'll take the following actions:

- We'll send you a payment reminder confirming the amount that needs to be paid and when it must be paid by. We may also try to telephone you or contact you using SMS or e-mail. If you don't make payments in line with an agreed instalment arrangement and don't bring your payments up to date, the instalment plan will be cancelled and the total outstanding balance will become due.

If your account remains unpaid and you don't contact us to agree a payment arrangement, we may issue notice of our intention to register a Default against your credit file. Ignoring this request for payment is likely to make obtaining finance more difficult and costly for you in the future, as Credit Reference Agency data can be viewed by organisations such as banks and other lenders and you may be refused credit as a result. Once registered, a Default will remain visible on your credit file for a period of six years, although it will be reported as satisfied once the Default sum has been repaid.

If you have an unresolved dispute on your account or you have an agreed payment plan that's up to date, we won't register a default on your credit file. However, a Default will not be removed unless it has been registered incorrectly. If you have a complaint about the registration of the Default and, following investigation, removing the Default is appropriate, we'll arrange for the incorrect information to be removed from your credit file.

If you still don't pay or contact us, we may take either of the following actions:

- Ask an independent debt collection agency to recover the amount owing. This may result in additional charges being added to your account. You'll be advised if we choose to take this action. All the companies we use are members of the Credit Services Association and operate under the association's strict code of practice on debt collection. Copies of this code are available from the Credit Services Association on 0191 286 5656. If you are unhappy with the way a debt collection agency has dealt with you, you can also raise your concern with us directly. Please refer to our complaints procedure section for information on how to do this.

If, when being referred to an external debt collection agency, you're successfully assessed for one of our financial assistance schemes, any additional charges will be removed. Details of all schemes and help and the criteria applied to consider eligibility can be found in the section 'Help if you're struggling to pay your bill'.



- We may instruct our solicitors to issue a County Court claim against you for the monies owed, along with the costs incurred and statutory interest. Prior to the claim being issued, you will be sent formal, written notification of our intention to do this. This letter is sent in accordance with the Pre-Action Protocol for Debt Claims, which came into effect on 1 October 2017. A copy of the Pre-Action Protocol can be found at [justice.gov.uk/courts/procedure-rules/civil/protocol](https://www.justice.gov.uk/courts/procedure-rules/civil/protocol).

If you fail to pay once the claim has been issued, we will make a request to the Court for Judgment to be registered. Similar to a Default, a County Court Judgment will be visible on your credit file and may cause difficulties for you when applying for credit.

Judgment Orders are enforceable if not complied with. Whilst we will always try to resolve matters with you directly, a number of enforcement options are available to us should the debt remain unpaid. These include:

- **High Court Enforcement** – High Court Enforcement Officers can be appointed to collect Judgment debts that are over £600. The costs associated with this type of enforcement can be high and these will be added to the Judgment debt. If High Court Enforcement Officers are appointed, they will write to you advising what you need to do.
- **Charging Order** – Where you are an owner of property or land, we may apply for a charge or restriction to be registered. This could prevent you from selling or re-mortgaging your property until the Judgment debt has been settled.
- **Attachment of Earnings** – If you are employed, we may make an application to the Court to have repayments deducted directly from your earnings.

If South East Water bills you for wastewater on our behalf, you'll be subject to the debt recovery procedures set out in South East Water's Code of Practice, which is available at corporate.southeastwater.co.uk/news-info/publications/customer-leaflets-and-codes-of-practice.

Privacy

If you contact us at any stage, we'll try to agree a payment arrangement with you to avoid any further action. We may exchange data with relevant credit reference and fraud prevention agencies. Some processes may be automated. A condensed guide to the use of your personal information by us, and the credit reference and fraud prevention agencies, is sent out with each customer's bill.

We operate a privacy policy which can be viewed in full at southernwater.co.uk/privacy and explains how we may use information supplied or collected from you, or via other sources. For further information, it also links to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) website.

You may also want to visit the ICO's 'Credit Explained' guidance document at: ico.org.uk/media/for-the-public/.../1282/credit-explained-dp-guidance.pdf.

Help if you're struggling to pay your bill

We understand that some of our customers experience genuine financial difficulties. Although water and wastewater services need to be paid for, we're always as flexible as possible when helping you find a solution.

To find out more about our range of payment schemes and tariffs, please read the following sections, or:

- call us on **0800 027 0363** between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.
- email us at payless@southernwater.co.uk
- find out more about these options or apply for financial assistance by completing the form at southernwater.co.uk/difficulty-paying-your-bill.

How we can help

We know talking about money can be difficult, but our specialist advisers are easy to talk to and can help you find a solution that suits your situation – for example, breaking payments down into more manageable amounts.

Our conversation with you will be confidential and we'll aim to apply the most suitable payment scheme or tariff based on your circumstances. We'll agree with you a weekly, fortnightly or monthly amount you can afford, so you can pay your bill within a reasonable time. We may ask for information relating to your income and expenditure so we can understand more about your financial circumstances.

If you don't already have one, we can discuss whether or not a water meter might reduce your future bills. Speak to our Customer Service team on **0330 303 1262** for further information.

If you already have a meter, we can suggest lots of ways you might be able to save water, along with how to find and repair leaks. For more help please visit southernwater.co.uk/save-water or call Customer Services on **0330 303 0277**.

Our range of payment options

Bill Cap Scheme - WaterSure

You may be eligible for a reduction in charges if you have a low income, your property has a water meter and you have three or more children or a medical condition requiring water. We may be able to help if you (or someone in your household) are receiving one of the benefits or tax credits shown below:

- Child Tax Credit (you must receive more than the family element)
- Housing Benefit
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income Support
- Pension Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit



Core customer information
for household customers

- Income related Employment & Support Allowance (ESA)

And either:

- you (or someone in your household) are responsible for three or more children under 19 in full-time education who live with you
- you, your child or the person receiving the benefit or tax credit have a specified medical condition requiring the use of more water than normal.

Social Tariff Scheme - Essentials tariff

Our Essentials tariff is designed to help customers who are struggling to pay their water services charges. It provides a discount of at least 45% on future bills.

If you receive your water supply from us

If you receive water and wastewater services from us, you'll qualify for our Essentials tariff if either:

- your household income is less than £16,105 (excluding Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence payments)
- someone in your household receives pension credits.

If you qualify, we'll discount the amount we charge you for services by between 20% and 90%, depending on your income. If you qualify through pension credit, we'll provide a 25% discount.

If you receive your water supply from another company

If you qualify for our Essentials tariff but you receive your water supply from another company and your wastewater services from us, we'll provide you with a 45% discount on your wastewater charges. You may be able to apply for your water supply company's financial assistance tariff for a discount on your water bill.

Debt Support Scheme - NewStart

NewStart can help you pay off your water bill debt. You might qualify if both of the following apply:

- You currently owe us money.
- You haven't made a payment for a while.

Water Direct – using benefit payments

You may consider paying us directly out of your benefits if you're claiming Income Support, Income-Based Job Seeker's Allowance, Employment Support Allowance, Universal Credit, Pension Credit or Jobcentre Plus.

If you have at least £50 arrears, Jobcentre Plus will take a fixed amount from your benefits to cover what you owe in arrears and your current charges.

To be considered for any, or a combination of, our assistance schemes and tariffs, you'll need to complete our Financial Assistance application form at assistance.southernwater.co.uk.

Debt Respite Scheme (Breathing Space)

Southern Water also offers Breathing Space, a Government Scheme which allows you to pause your payments if you need help getting back on your feet. Customers will need to seek debt advice from a debt adviser to be able to access a breathing space.

Other support available to you

If you're worried about household bills in general, you may benefit from getting in touch with an independent advice service, such as:

Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice is an independent charity, which provides free, confidential and impartial advice on a wide range of problems. Expert advisers can help you with your debts and are able to negotiate repayment plans with your creditors. If you have other problems, such as illness, redundancy or divorce, the adviser may be able to help or tell you where you can get further advice. To find your nearest Citizens Advice, visit citizensadvice.org.uk.

Step Change

Step Change helps people to manage their debts, offering tailored advice and practical solutions. The advice it provides is effective, confidential and free. For further details, call **0800 138 1111** or visit stepchange.org.

Other assistance

Some Money Advice Centres, which can be found in your local phone book, provide a similar free debt counselling service. You can also get in touch with the Department for Work and Pensions to see if you might be eligible to claim any benefit(s). It won't be able to give you financial assistance, but may be able to provide support in other ways.

If you've already contacted other organisations and they're advising you, please let us know. Once you've contacted a recognised agency, we can put the debt recovery process on hold for 30 days with the possibility of extending this by another 30 days.

Adherence to other legal requirements

Southern Water is fully compliant with the Equality Act 2010. You can read further information regarding our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion in our policy available here:

[Microsoft Word - HR 110 i04 \(southernwater.co.uk\)](https://southernwater.co.uk/HR-110-i04)

Priority services – help when you need it most

You're entitled to expect high standards of service from us.

We always try to give all of our customers the best care. However, we know some of our customers – for example, the elderly or disabled – may have extra needs and concerns.

To help us provide everyone with the best possible service, we keep a confidential list of customers who have individual needs.

Our Priority Services Register

Our Priority Services Register lets our employees know about all of our customers who have special circumstances. For customers on the register, we provide the following services for free:

- Bottled water delivery in the event of a water supply outage
- Information in large print or Braille
- Talking bills
- CDs or audio – we can convert letters, leaflets or bills into audio formats
- The option to send bills to friends or carers
- Frequent water meter-reading service
- Advice on water efficiency and special water appliances in your home
- Password scheme

Let us know if you need extra support

Tell us if you'd like to be added to our Priority Services Register using any of the following:

- **Phone us** on **0800 027 0800**, Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm (calls from BT landlines are free but charges from mobiles or other service providers may vary)
- **Visit our website** at southernwater.co.uk/services-we-offer
- **Write to us** at: Southern Water, PO Box 564, Darlington, DL1 9ZG

Letting other organisations know

If you allow us to do so, we will share your priority services information with your electricity network operator. This will ensure your energy suppliers are aware of your circumstances without you having to tell them.

If you're unhappy with our service

Our complaints procedure

We aim to get things right first time, but if things do go wrong we'll fix them quickly for you.

Step 1 – Just call a member of our team on 0330 303 0223 (calls charged at local rate Monday to Friday, 8am-7pm. Closed on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays) or chat to us at [southernwater.co.uk/live-chat](https://www.southernwater.co.uk/live-chat) (Monday to Friday, 8am-7pm. Saturdays 8:30am- 2pm. Closed Sundays and Bank Holidays)

Step 2 – If you are not happy with the resolution or need further help then call 0330 303 0223 and ask to speak to a manager

Step 3 – If:

- You are not happy with the final resolution, or
- Your issue is over 8 weeks old, or
- You just want some free, trusted, independent advice

You can call the Consumer Council for Water (CCW) the independent voice for water consumers in England and Wales by calling 0300 034 2222 or use its online form at www.ccwater.org.uk/contact-us

Our complaints procedure explains the full process we follow. Call us on the number above to request a copy or view it at [southernwater.co.uk/complaints-procedure](https://www.southernwater.co.uk/complaints-procedure).

Putting a complaint in writing

If you'd prefer to write, you can use our online form at [southernwater.co.uk/get-in-touch](https://www.southernwater.co.uk/get-in-touch) or send a letter to: Southern Water, PO Box 564, Darlington, DL1 9ZG. Any legal correspondence and/or documentation should be sent to our registered office address: Southern House, Yeoman Road, Worthing, West Sussex, BN13 3NX.

We'll acknowledge we have received your complaint and reply to you within 10 working days of receiving your complaint, so don't worry if you don't hear back from us straight away. Someone will be looking at your complaint and working to find a resolution for you.

What happens next

Stage 1: We'll give you a call to understand your issue and try to resolve things over the phone. If we can't get hold of you, we'll send you a written reply in 10 working days. Our reply will include a phone number and the name of the person dealing with your complaint in case you want to discuss our response at all.

Stage 2: If you're unhappy with the outcome of your complaint and write to us again, your complaint will be reviewed by our Customer Services Manager.

Stage 3: If:

- You are not happy with the final resolution, or
- Your issue is over 8 weeks old, or
- You just want some free, trusted, independent advice

You can call the Consumer Council for Water (CCW) the independent voice for water consumers in England and Wales by calling 0300 034 2222, use its online form at www.ccwater.org.uk/contact-us or write to CCW, c/o 1st Floor, Victoria Square House, Victoria Square, Birmingham, B2 4AJ

Stage 4: If you're still dissatisfied, you may be able to refer your case for an independent review by the Water Industry Redress Scheme (WATRS). CCW will let you know if your complaint is eligible to be dealt with by WATRS.

For more details about WATRS or to make an application:

Visit: watsr.org

Email: info@watsr.org

Call: 0207 520 3801

Write to: WATRS, International Dispute Resolution Centre, 70 Fleet Street, London, EC4Y 1EU

Arbitration

Under the Water Industry Act 1991, some disputes between customers and us may be decided by an arbitrator, to be agreed between the two parties. You or we may refer some disputes to Ofwat to determine. The most common disputes Ofwat deals with are detailed at: ofwat.gov.uk/regulated-companies/investigations/how-we-investigate/complaints-disputes-can-help/.

In some cases, the costs of the arbitration may be payable by whichever party is unsuccessful in the dispute. Disputes that can be referred to arbitration include anything about:

- our powers to install a water meter, compensation or the distribution of expenses
- possible compensation due after work we've done in your street.

Guaranteed standards of service

This customer charter emphasises our commitment to our household customers. It details the minimum standards of service you can expect in our main areas of business – and the compensation payments we'll make if we fall short of these standards.

To view these standards, visit southernwater.co.uk/our-story/guaranteed-standards-of-service.

To request a full copy, please complete the form at southernwater.co.uk/help-advice/contact-us.

GSS payments will be made in accordance with Ofwat's guidance, which can be found at: ofwat.gov.uk/households/supply-and-standards/standards-of-service/.

Water supply

Supply interruptions

Planned

If we have to carry out planned work that involves interrupting your water supply for more than four hours, we'll let you know at least 48 hours before the interruption will start and will tell you when we expect the supply to be restored.

If we fail to correctly notify you of the interruption, or if the supply is not restored in the stated time, we'll automatically credit your water services account with £30.

Payments for planned supply interruptions will not apply under the following circumstances:

- Industrial action by our employees makes it unfeasible for us to give the correct notice at least 48 hours before the supply was cut off.
- The act or default of a person other than our representative made it unfeasible for us to give the correct notice at least 48 hours before the supply was cut off.
- It's impractical for us to have identified you as being affected, and you haven't made a claim within three months of the date on which the supply was cut off.

Unplanned

Clearly, we cannot notify you before an unplanned interruption, such as a burst. However, we aim to restore your supply within 12 hours. If the interruption extends beyond that, we'll automatically compensate you for this and each additional period of 12 hours during which the interruption continues.

If we believe the interruption period is going to be significant, where possible, we'll arrange an alternative supply.

If we fail to restore the supply within 12 hours, we'll automatically credit your water services account with £30. A further automatic payment of £30 will be made for each additional period of 12 hours during which the interruption continues.

Identifying all properties and customers affected by an interruption can be difficult. If you've been affected by an interruption but we haven't contacted you, you must make a claim (either orally or in writing) within three months of the date on which the supply was interrupted to obtain any compensation. To make a claim, please complete the form at the bottom of our [contact us](#) page.

If we were aware you had been affected by an interruption and we failed to provide the compensation due to you within 20 working days of the date of interruption, you may be entitled to a further penalty payment of £20, which we'll automatically credit to your water services account.

Low water pressure

If, due to unplanned events, you experience significant low pressure – less than seven metres static head (0.7 bar) in your communication pipe – for more than one hour on two separate occasions within a 28-day period, we'll credit your water services account with £25.

As identifying all properties affected by low water pressure can be difficult, you should make a claim to ensure you receive this compensation. All claims must be made in writing within three months of the second occasion. If you'd like to make a claim, please complete the form at the bottom of the [contact us](#) page.

Wastewater

Sewer flooding – general

Normally, we aim to respond to a complaint of sewer flooding within two hours of the first report of flooding inside a property (internal) and within four hours if flooding is outside a property (external).

Where possible, we'll also provide a disinfection service within 12 hours (internal flooding) or within 24 hours (external flooding).

Sewer flooding – internal and external

Internal flooding

If your premises are internally flooded due to a failure of our drainage system, we'll automatically make a payment to you of an amount equivalent to your annual wastewater charge, from a minimum of £150 to a maximum of £1,000 for each incident.

We'll write to you within 20 working days of the incident, enclosing details of the payment and informing you of the action we plan to take and any investigations we intend to carry out.

If we fail to make a payment either by sending you a cheque or by crediting your account within 20 working days of the incident, you'll be entitled to an additional payment of £20, which we'll automatically credit to your account.

External flooding

If your property is flooded externally due to a failure of our drainage system, you may claim an amount equivalent to half your annual sewerage charges – from a minimum of £75 to a maximum of £500.

You must make a claim within three months of the incident and provide information to prove you were materially affected by the flooding incident.

If you have any photographs of the flooding, please send them to us with a completed claim form. Forms can be [downloaded](#) from our website or requested by calling our Contact Centre on [0330 303 0368](#) (calls charged at local rate). We'll write to you within 20 working days of receiving your substantiated claim, enclosing details of your payment.

If we fail to either send you a cheque or credit your account within 20 working days of receiving your claim, you'll be entitled to an additional payment of £20.

Internal and external flooding

If you experience both internal and external flooding in one incident, the payment you're entitled to will be calculated based on internal flooding.

Conditions

In all cases, payments will not apply if:

- the flooding happened because of exceptional weather conditions or industrial action
- the flooding was caused by a customer's action or any defect, blockage or inadequacy of private sewers, council or highway drains
- you notified us more than three months after your property was flooded.

Customer service

Account queries

We aim to respond to written account queries within five working days.

If we fail to respond to a written account query about the correctness of our charges within 10 working days of receipt, we'll automatically credit your water services account with £20.

If we fail to credit your account within 10 working days of our reply, you'll be entitled to a further penalty payment of £10, which we'll automatically credit to your water services account.

Payment arrangements

We'll respond to a request to change your payment method within five working days of receiving your request.

If we can't agree to the request and fail to meet this standard, we'll automatically credit your water services account with £20.

If we fail to credit your account within 10 working days of our reply, you'll be entitled to a further payment of £10, which we'll automatically credit to your water services account.

Written complaints

We aim to respond fully to written complaints within five working days of receiving your letter.

If we fail to send a reply within 10 working days, we'll automatically credit your water services account with £20.

If we fail to send you a refund cheque or credit your account within 10 working days of our reply, you'll be entitled to a further penalty payment of £10, which we'll automatically credit to your water services account.

Appointments

Appointments

We operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you report an emergency, an appointment on a future date isn't appropriate and we'll respond as quickly as we can.

When we need to visit you at your premises and you need to be present, we'll advise you whether our visit will take place either morning (before 12pm) or afternoon (after 12pm).

You can request the visit to occur in a two hour period (if preferred).

If we book the appointment incorrectly by failing to specify a morning/afternoon slot – or two hour slot, if requested – we'll automatically credit your water services account with £20.

If we don't keep the appointment as made (the agreed day, morning/afternoon slot as specified, or two-hour time slot if agreed), we'll credit your water services account with £20.

If we fail to make the appointment or cancel the appointment with less than 24 hours' notice, we'll automatically credit your water services account with £20.

Payments will not apply under the following circumstances:

- You cancel the appointment.
- We cancel the appointment, giving at least 24 hours' notice.
- Keeping the appointment isn't feasible due to severe weather.
- Keeping the appointment isn't feasible due to industrial action by our employees.
- Keeping the appointment isn't feasible due to an act or default of a person other our representative.

If we fail to credit your account within 10 working days of the missed appointment date, you'll be entitled to an additional compensation payment of £10, which we'll automatically credit to your water services account.

Disputes

If we're unable to agree your entitlement to a payment or credit, you can refer the matter to: The Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat), Centre City Tower, 7 Hill Street, Birmingham B5 4UA. It may call for all relevant information and will then determine the dispute.

Your legal rights

A claim of payment or credit under this scheme doesn't affect any other legal right to compensation you may have and doesn't form an admission on our part as to liability in the event of any legal or other proceedings taking place.

Additional standards

In addition to the Guaranteed Standards Scheme, we also make the following provisions for imposing water restriction.

We'll do our best to safeguard your water supply and try to avoid having to impose water restrictions or the use of standpipes in times of drought. Unfortunately, in exceptional circumstances, avoiding such restrictions may be impossible.

If your supply of water for essential domestic purposes is interrupted or cut off as a result of an emergency restriction authorised by a drought order (other than through exceptional drought circumstances, which couldn't have been avoided), we'll credit your water services account with £10 per day, subject to a maximum of our average water bill for the previous year.

Ofwat will make the final decision on any dispute on this issue.

Temporary Use Bans

Commonly referred to as TUBs, these are powers granted to water companies to impose restrictions on customers' water use. They were previously referred to as hosepipe bans in the Water Industry Act 1991, but they were modified in 2010 under the Flood and Water Management Act to cover a wider range of restrictions.

The circumstances in which water companies may exercise these powers are not expressly linked to drought.

Before imposing TUBs, a water company must be sure it faces a serious shortage of water available for distribution (or one is threatened). With drought orders and drought permits, we also need to make sure that the actual or threatened water shortage is because of an exceptional shortage of rain.

TUBs may be imposed by water companies under their own powers in Section 76 (2) of the Water Industry Act 1991 (as amended by section 36 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and The Water Use (Temporary Bans) Order 2010) and do not require the prior approval of the Secretary of State/National Assembly for Wales or the Environment Agency.

The scope of the powers water companies may exercise under this section is limited to prohibiting the following uses of water:

- Watering a garden using a hosepipe
- Cleaning a private motor-vehicle using a hosepipe
- Watering plants on household or other non-household premises using a hosepipe
- Cleaning a private leisure boat using a hosepipe

- Filling or maintaining a domestic swimming or paddling pool
- Drawing water, using a hosepipe, for domestic recreational use
- Filling or maintaining a domestic pond using a hosepipe
- Filling or maintaining an ornamental fountain
- Cleaning walls, or windows, of household premises using a hosepipe
- Cleaning paths or patios using a hosepipe
- Cleaning other artificial outdoor surfaces using a hosepipe

TUBs only apply to water taken from the mains supply.

In a worsening drought, simple supply and demand management measures are not always enough and water companies may have to take additional steps by applying to the Environment Agency for a Drought Permit or to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs/National Assembly for Wales for a Drought Order.

Defra, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Environment Agency provide a booklet about the process for obtaining drought orders and drought permits at [gov.uk/government/collections/apply-for-a-drought-permit-drought-order-or-emergency-drought-order](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/apply-for-a-drought-permit-drought-order-or-emergency-drought-order).

Drought orders and permits provide a temporary mechanism for managing water resources limited by an exceptional shortage of rain. They're a water resources management tool and exist to help avoid risk to public water supplies while providing the best possible protection for the environment.

Privacy notice

We're committed to protecting and respecting your privacy. We will only use your personal information in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Privacy and Electronic Communication Regulation 2003 (PECR).

To find out more about the information we collect and your rights, please visit southernwater.co.uk/privacy-statement.