

# When your water supply has a leak.

Code of practice for  
domestic properties



# Contents

- 3** What this leaflet is about
- 4** Responsibility for water pipes
- 5** Finding leaks
- 6** Fixing leaks
- 8** Your water bill
- 9** Leak allowances if you've a water meter
- 11** Water meters
- 13** Using water wisely
- 14** If you wish to make a complaint
- 14** Contact information

# What this leaflet is about

If you're a private individual or organisation who owns a property that is used for domestic use, this leaflet is for you. It explains:

- How important it is to care for our precious water supply, which is essential to our health and well being
- Who's responsible for the water pipes in and around your property, as shown in the diagram in the section 'Responsibility for water pipes'
- What to do if you think you've a water leak in any of these pipes and what we'll do to help you
- The leakage allowances we'll apply if you have a metered water supply
- The benefits of having a water meter to monitor your usage
- How we can use water more wisely.

## Responsibility for water pipes

### Our water mains and pipes

We're responsible for the mains that carry water around our region and for the water pipe, known as 'the communication pipe', which links your water supply pipe to our water main.

We look after our own water mains and pipes, undertaking regular maintenance and repairs. We also have an extensive programme to replace old mains in poor condition to reduce the number of leaks and bursts.

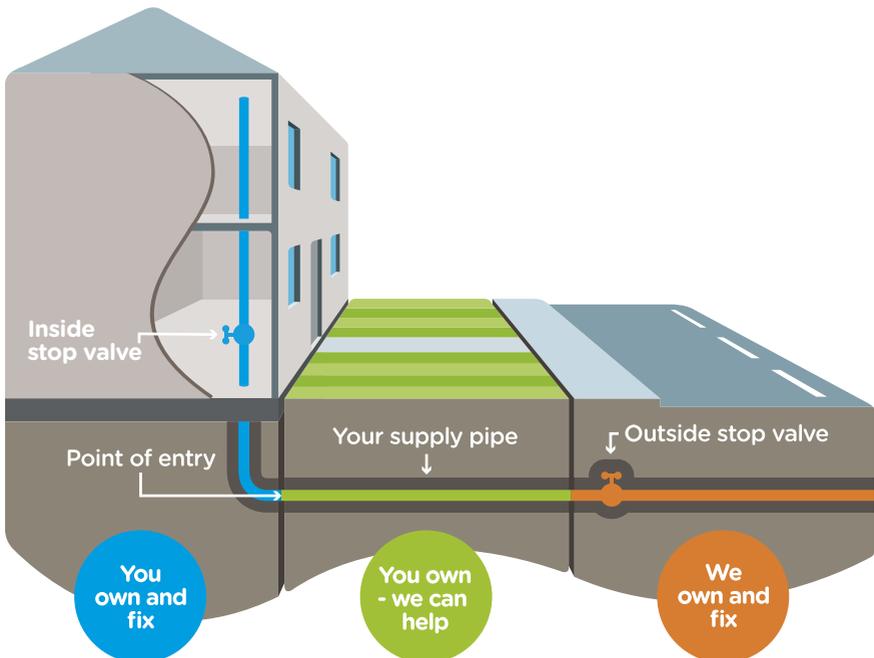
### Your water supply and internal pipes

The illustration below shows the water main and water pipes that usually serve a domestic property.

As a general rule, you're responsible for the water supply pipe that runs from the boundary of your property, into your home and for all your internal pipes and fittings.

If your water supply pipe crosses land belonging to someone else, you're responsible for the pipe from the point where it connects to our water main in the public highway.

Sometimes two or more properties share a single water supply pipe and this is known as a 'shared supply'. If you have a shared supply and need help or advice on responsibility for its maintenance and repair, please visit [thameswater.co.uk/customerleak](http://thameswater.co.uk/customerleak).



## Finding leaks

### On our water mains and pipes

We've an extensive 24 hour programme in place to detect leaks on our water mains and pipes. We also rely on you to let us know if you see a leak in the road, on a pavement or anywhere else.

We're grateful to everyone who reports leaks and bursts, which you can do 24 hours a day. Just send a tweet with the location to @thameswater or use #tweetaleak, visit [thameswater.co.uk/customerleak](https://thameswater.co.uk/customerleak) and click on 'Report a leak online', or call our freephone Leakline 0800 714 614.

### On your water supply pipe

When looking for leaks, we may find a leak on one of your pipes. If we do we'll tell you about it and help get the leak repaired to stop the wastage of water.

If you experience reduced water pressure or flow at your cold kitchen tap, you see damp or waterlogged areas in your garden even during spells of dry weather, hear noisy pipework, or receive an unusually high metered bill, you may have a leak.

If you've a metered water supply, take regular meter readings and look

for any significant and unexpected increase in your use of water that may indicate a possible leak. You can also carry out a simple test to check for leakage by following these instructions:

- Turn off your stop valve in the home (usually under the kitchen sink)
- Make sure no cisterns are filling or taps are being used
- Read the meter
- Leave the stop valve shut and then read the meter again in half an hour.

The meter dial shouldn't have moved, as you haven't been using any water. If it has moved, there may be a leak between the meter and the stop valve in your house.

If you think your water supply pipe is leaking, call us on 0800 980 8800 24 hours a day. We'll arrange an inspection and let you know what we can do to help you get the leak fixed. It's important that all leaks are repaired as quickly as possible and the next section explains how we'll help you.

## Fixing leaks

### On our water mains and pipes

We repair leaks on the water mains and pipes that belong to us as soon as we can, replacing pipes in poor condition, as part of our ongoing investment programme. Although we make every effort to repair them quickly, we normally need to gain permission from the highway authority before we dig up a footpath or road.

At the time of producing this leaflet, we've reduced leakage by more than a third, replaced more than 1,600 miles of worn out Victorian water mains, and met our leakage reduction targets set by our regulator, Ofwat, for each of the past six years.

You can visit [thameswater.co.uk](http://thameswater.co.uk) 24 hours a day to check current incidents and anything that may be happening in your area.

### On your water supply pipe

Even though it's your responsibility to fix a leaking water supply pipe, we offer to replace your water supply pipe free of charge so we can stop the wastage of water. This offer includes shared external supply pipes that serve domestic properties. This free offer applies to water supply pipes up to a length of 25m and 50mm in diameter.

We'll replace your water supply pipe up to the point it enters the building. For example, in the case of a house converted into flats, we'll replace to the point the water supply pipe enters the main building, but not an individual premise, such as

an individual flat, within the main building. We'll make every effort to replace your water supply pipe but if it's impractical, we'll carry out a repair instead.

Our free offer applies to the domestic property owner, including individual local authority/housing association properties (not blocks of flats) and domestic properties with a shared water supply pipe. We offer one free replacement or repair per owner per property. This means that if you've recently bought a new property and we gave a subsidy or undertook a free replacement/repair for the previous owner, you'll still be eligible for further help. If there's a change in tenancy however (not landlord), a further replacement/repair won't be provided free of charge.

The work we undertake for you will be fully guaranteed. The guarantee period will depend upon whether we replaced or repaired your water supply pipe. Your guarantee certificate will indicate the guarantee you have and how long the guarantee is valid.

Where possible we'll use trenchless technology known as 'moling' to insert the new pipe. If we have to dig underneath your footpath or driveway, we'll restore the surface so that it's safe again for you to use. Please understand, however, that we're unable to undertake specialist work, for example relay block or crazy paving. In such cases, we'll make the area safe for you to use but you'll need to arrange for a specialist to relay your surface to its original condition.

## Our codes of practice – When your water supply has a leak.

Either you can ask us to do the replacement (or repair) free of charge and then you arrange for a specialist to undertake the reinstatement work at your expense, or you can make your own arrangements to get your water supply pipe replaced or repaired. If you decide not to take up our free offer of replacement (or repair) and make your own arrangements, you'll be responsible for paying all costs.

If you do arrange for your own plumber to do the work and fix the leak, it must be fixed within six weeks of the date we confirmed the leak. If you don't do this, we'll send you a legal notice, under Section 75 of the Water Industry Act 1991, explaining that we'll fix the leak in accordance with our statutory duties. We may look to recover reasonable costs from you if we have to issue this legal notice.

### **On fittings inside your home**

If you're the owner of the property you're responsible for fixing any leakage or wastage from the pipework, fixtures or fittings inside your property. Under Section 73 of the Water Industry Act 1991 we've a legal duty to ensure that water supplied by us isn't wasted, as it's a criminal offence to waste water.

As the owner of the property, you're responsible for all internal water fittings. If you intentionally or negligently cause water supplied by us to be wasted, you can face a maximum penalty of £1,000.

If we identify wastage of water from your internal pipework, fixtures or fittings, we'll give you advice about getting the leak fixed. We'll also write to you explaining your legal responsibilities and ask you to complete the repair within six weeks.

## **Your water bill**

### **If you don't have a water meter**

Your water bill is based on the chargeable value (previously known as the rateable value) of your property and is a set annual charge for all your water usage. Although the local authorities' rating system was abolished in 1990, the chargeable value still remains valid for calculating water service charges where the water supply isn't connected to a meter. Council Tax bands have no bearing on the chargeable value of a property. In cases where the Council Tax band is changed, your chargeable value remains the same.

As you pay a set annual charge for all your water usage, we don't need to adjust your charges for any water lost through a leaking supply pipe, as your annual bill remains the same.

### **If you do have a water meter**

Your meter will record all the water that passes through it, including any water lost through a leaking supply pipe. This means that your water and wastewater bill will be based on the water you have actually used, as well as any water lost because of the leak. However, we do give a leakage allowance to the person who pays the bill, in specific circumstances.

## Leak allowances if you have a water meter

If you've a water meter and are the owner occupier, the landlord or the tenant who pays the bill, you'll be eligible for a leak allowance once the water supply pipe has been replaced or repaired, as long as:

- The leak is repaired within six weeks of the leak being confirmed
- You make a claim for an allowance within three months of the date of repair, even if you haven't yet received a water bill for this property
- The leak wasn't caused through negligence
- You haven't been given an allowance for a water leak at the same property
- We haven't needed to issue you with a Section 75 notice because the leak was not repaired within the time allowed

- The leak was on your external water supply pipe and not on your internal fixtures and fittings.

The leakage allowance is applied per customer per property. This means that if you're granted an allowance at your current address, it doesn't prevent you from claiming an allowance for your new property if you move home. Similarly, if we've replaced (repaired) your water supply pipe and it leaks within the guaranteed period, we'll make an additional allowance where claimed.

If you don't meet the above criteria for a leak allowance but feel there are exceptional circumstances, please let us know and we'll consider your claim on its own merits.

### Calculating a leakage allowance

As soon as you tell us you have a leak, we'll let you know how you can claim an allowance. Once we've repaired the leak, or had confirmation that the leak has been repaired (within six weeks of it being confirmed), we'll calculate and apply an allowance as soon as is reasonably practical.

## Our codes of practice – When your water supply has a leak.

If your property has its own water supply and meter, calculation of an allowance is straightforward.

The adjustment of your water and wastewater charges\* will be based on comparing how much water you used in the past with the amount of water recorded by the meter during the time you had a leak. The allowance applied to your water services account will be the difference between the two amounts. If there's no record of past use, an adjustment will be made based on typical water use for a similar property household. This calculation will be based on your property size and number of occupants.

The maximum leak allowance is given for 'two billing periods'. This normally means giving you an allowance for the period covered by your last two meter readings, plus the leak repair time of a maximum of four weeks.

If, after we have adjusted your bill, you don't feel the allowance truly reflects

the difference between the amount of water you normally would have used and the amount recorded on your meter because of the leak, please let us know. We'll review the allowance and let you know our decision.

\* If we supply your water and another company provides your wastewater services, we'll let them know so they can apply an allowance to your wastewater account.

### Properties used for both domestic and commercial purposes

Where the leak is on your water supply pipe delivering water to both commercial and domestic areas of your site or property, for example a shop with a flat above, we'll agree a percentage adjustment with you. We'll then calculate the total amount lost to leakage and apply the appropriate leakage allowance according to the domestic/commercial split of the property affected.

## Water meters

### Keeping an eye on what you use

If you've a metered water supply, your water and wastewater bill is based on the amount of water recorded through your meter, plus a fixed charge which includes the costs of billing and handling customer enquiries, as well as surface and highway drainage. Taking regular readings will help you keep an eye on the amount of water you use and will help to spot potential leakage.

### Getting a water meter fitted

If you don't pay on the basis of a water meter, you may wish to consider doing so and we fit meters free of charge. For some customers, particularly those with low usage, this has resulted in lower water and wastewater bills.

Your annual metered charges will depend on how many people live with you and how much water you all use. To get an idea of what your annual metered charge could be visit [thameswater.co.uk/requestameter](https://thameswater.co.uk/requestameter) and click on the 'Water usage calculator'.

If you ask us to fit a meter, you've the legal right to revert back to an

unmetered charge basis within the first year following installation. This right to go back to your previous unmetered charge basis only applies if you have actually asked us to fit a meter. It doesn't apply if a meter is already fitted at your property or we compulsorily fit a meter.

The meters we fit remain our property and we're responsible for maintaining them. We select where the meter will be fitted, in line with the regulations made by the Government, and there are three possible locations:

- Outside, adjacent to your property wall, preferably in the soft part of the garden;
- Outside, at your boundary with the road or footpath;
- Inside your property.

We normally fit meters free of charge. However, if you're unhappy with where we intend to fit a new meter, if practicable, we'll install the meter in your preferred location but we'll ask you to pay any additional costs this may incur. If you already have a meter and want us to relocate it, we'll expect you to pay the cost of this work. You can find more information at [thameswater.co.uk/requestameter](https://thameswater.co.uk/requestameter).

## Our codes of practice – **When your water supply has a leak.**

Water can often escape undetected from leaking underground pipes. Therefore, when we first install an external meter we check for leakage at the time. If we find a leak while fitting the meter, it may be possible to repair there and then, especially if the leak is within the excavated area. If there appears to be a leak further along the pipe, we'll tell you about it and we'll offer you the replacement (or repair) service set out in the 'Fixing leaks' section.

### **Accuracy of water meters**

We only use water meters checked by Trading Standards officers before they leave the factory. If you think your water meter isn't accurate, please visit [thameswater.co.uk](http://thameswater.co.uk) to let us know. We'll investigate and if necessary replace the meter. The new meter will then be used to charge you for your water use from the date it was fitted.

We can arrange for an independent

company to test your old meter and there's a charge of £70 for this full meter test but we'll refund the cost if the meter is found to be inaccurate. We'll provide you with a copy of the results when the test is completed and if the meter has been giving the wrong readings we'll adjust your bill.

We'll normally assume the meter had been reading correctly up to the meter reading before the one that identified there was a fault. Any adjustments made to your bill will be based on how much water you have used in the past when the meter was working correctly or on the new meter readings if the historic information is not available, or no longer relevant.

## Using water wisely

On average you'll use over 1,000 litres of water every week, but there are some really simple ways to reduce your water use –such as turning off the tap when brushing your teeth, or taking a shorter shower.

Visit our interactive town at [thameswater.co.uk/waterwisely](http://thameswater.co.uk/waterwisely) and calculate your water use to see if you're a high or low user and how you compare with everyone else.

You'll also find tips to help you reduce the amount of water you use and choose from our range of free water-saving gadgets to fit to showers, taps and toilets to help you reduce your household water use. If you don't have the internet, you can write to us about the free gadgets at Water-Saving Products, Freepost SCE 8448, PO Box 2747, Reading, RG30 4BR.

The table below tells you how much water is used during different activities and may help you to think about ways you could reduce the amount of water you actually use.

Activity	Litres	Buckets
Bath	80	16+
4 minute shower (not power shower)	40	8
Brushing teeth (with tap running)	6	1.2
Brushing teeth (with tap off)	1	0.2
Washing machine	65	13
Dripping tap	63 per week	13
Washing car with bucket	10	2
Hose/Sprinkler	540 per hour	108

## **If you wish to make a complaint**

If you're unhappy with the service we've given you, please let us know so we can put it right as quickly as possible.

### **Bill and account queries**

If you're unhappy with the way we have handled your bill or account, please call us on 0800 009 3669 (Textphone 0800 316 6899). This line is available 8am to 5pm Monday to Friday and closed on bank holidays.

### **Water supply or wastewater services queries**

If you're unhappy with our water supply or wastewater services, please call us on 0800 980 8800 (Textphone 0800 316 9898). Our lines are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

If you're unable to call us, please write to:

Thames Water  
PO Box 436  
Swindon  
SN38 8TU

We'll respond to you within 10 working days and if you remain unhappy you can ask our Customer Service Director to review your case.

### **Consumer Council for Water (CCWater)**

If you continue to remain dissatisfied you can then contact the Consumer Council for Water (CCWater) on 0300 034 2222, email [enquiries@ccwater.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ccwater.org.uk) or write to them at:

Consumer Council for Water  
1st Floor  
Victoria Square House  
Victoria Square  
Birmingham  
B2 4AJ

Fax: 0121 345 1010

Alternatively, visit [www.ccwater.org.uk](http://www.ccwater.org.uk)

CCWater is independent of both Thames Water and Ofwat. CCWater will investigate your complaint and may take it up with us on your behalf. Normally they will only take up your complaint if we've been given the opportunity to put things right first.

## Our codes of practice – When your water supply has a leak.

### Our Quality Promise leaflet

If you'd like more details of our complaints procedure, the leaflet 'Our Quality Promise' can be downloaded from our website at [thameswater.co.uk/literature](http://thameswater.co.uk/literature) or you can call us on 0800 980 8800 to arrange for a copy to be sent to you.

Together with the Customer Code of Practice for Household Customers and our Debt Code of Practice, 'How to get help if you can't pay your bill', this leaflet is an important reference document about our levels of service. Ofwat has approved all three leaflets. You can find copies on our website at [thameswater.co.uk/literature](http://thameswater.co.uk/literature), or you can call us on 0800 980 8800 and ask for copies.

### What happens if your complaint is not resolved

If your complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction, you may be eligible for a review under the Water Redress Scheme (WATRS). This is an independent adjudication service to resolve disputes between customers and water companies. The Scheme will address those complaints which

remain unresolved at the end of the complaints process. It will be accessible when all efforts to resolve the complaint have failed, the parties concerned cannot agree upon an outcome and neither party is willing to change its position. If you have received a WATRS letter from CCWater and your complaint falls within the eligibility criteria for the scheme, you can make an application via WATRS website [www.watrs.org](http://www.watrs.org) or you can ask for an application form to be sent to you via [info@watrs.org](mailto:info@watrs.org) or by phoning 0207 520 3801. Guidance notes are available on the website or you can ask for a copy to be sent to you. Their address is WATRS, International Dispute Resolution Centre, 70 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1EU.

# Get in touch.



## Online [thameswater.co.uk](https://www.thameswater.co.uk)

You can contact us online to make a payment, tell us you're moving, provide a meter reading, send us an enquiry, and much more.



## By telephone Report a leak 0800 714 614

### Your bill and account

For queries relating to your bill, change of address, meter readings and other billing enquiries, you can speak to our team on **0800 980 8800**.

Monday to Friday      8am to 8pm  
Saturday                8am to 6pm

Textphone service if you are deaf or hard of hearing: **0800 316 6899**.

### Telephone self service

We have a wide range of self-service options available 24 hours a day, including:

- Pay your bill with a debit or credit card
- Set up a Direct Debit or payment plan
- Check your balance

### Water and wastewater services

For water and wastewater enquiries, emergencies and other non-billing enquiries, you can call our team 24 hours a day on

**0800 316 9800**

Textphone service if you are deaf or hard of hearing: **0800 316 9898**

To contact us from abroad: **+44 1793 486555**



## By post

Thames Water, PO Box 286, Swindon SN38 2RA



**This leaflet can be supplied in large print, braille, or audio format upon request.**