



Our sewerage services

Our code of practice:
how we deal
with your
used water



**NORTHUMBRIAN
WATER**



Our sewerage services

This leaflet gives details of the services we provide to deal with your used water. It also explains what your rights are and what to do if things go wrong.

Contents

- 3 Our responsibility for public sewers
 - Your drains
 - Other types of drainage
- 4 Types of public sewers
 - Maps of our public sewers
 - Private or unadopted sewers
 - Alterations to existing pipework
- 5 New connections to sewers
- 6 What if there is no existing sewer?
 - Sewer requisitions
 - First time sewerage
- 7 Sewage treatment
 - What not to put down the sewer
- 8 Protection against flooding from public sewers
- 9 Payments and guaranteed standards of service
- 10 Putting it right
- 11 How to contact us
 - Finding out more



Our responsibility for public sewers

Northumbrian Water owns, operates and maintains a network of over 15,000 kilometres of public sewers, which are designed to take away waste water to our sewage treatment works. This system is called the sewerage network.

In most cases these sewers are situated in roads or public open spaces. In certain circumstances they may run through private land, in which case we need to preserve a right of access for maintenance and legal protection against building over or in close proximity to our sewers.

Your drains

Private drains, which carry your household's rainwater and used dirty water, are your responsibility to the point of connection with our sewer. You are responsible for all private pipework both inside and outside your property including any pipework under footpaths, verges, roads and any pipework passing under other people's land. You may share a private sewer with one or more of your neighbours, in which case responsibility is shared with the other users.

If this shared sewer was in use before 1 October 1937 and it serves more than one property, it is possible that Northumbrian Water is responsible for the pipework. A site visit may help to establish if this is the case; please telephone **0845 717 1100** to request our assistance in identifying ownership. You may be asked to prove the age of the pipework before we can offer assistance.

If your property is not connected to the public sewer and uses a cesspit or septic tank, this forms part of your private drainage system. You are responsible for emptying and maintaining this apparatus.

Other types of drainage

There are other types of drainage which are not Northumbrian Water's responsibility. If you have any concerns about them please contact the relevant body:

- Local authorities - most drains and sewers around council houses and most highway drainage (gullies etc).
- Highway Agency - drainage from main road (trunk roads).
- Environment Agency - flooding from main rivers and the sea.
- Landowners - storm water running off fields and farmland.



Types of public sewers

Foul sewers carry waste water; water that has been used for cooking and washing, and the waste from toilets and trade premises to our sewage treatment works.

Surface water sewers carry rainwater that runs off roofed areas, pavements and roads usually into streams, rivers or watercourses.

Combined sewers carry both waste water and surface water to our sewage treatment works.

Maps of our public sewers

By law we are obliged to keep maps that show the approximate position of public sewers and you have a right to see our records. To arrange this please contact us on **0845 717 1100**.

Alternatively, you could contact your local authority who should also be able to assist you.

Private or unadopted sewers

There are some sewers in our area that we do not own. They are called private or unadopted sewers. This means that when they were built, or when they would normally have become

public sewers, the owner or developer did not want them to become public sewers or they did not meet the required construction standards. They have remained privately owned either by the developer, or more likely, jointly by the owners of the houses that they serve.

You can apply for us to adopt a private sewer so that we, rather than you, become responsible for it. Before we take responsibility for it we will need to be satisfied that it is in a suitable condition. That means that if any work is needed to bring the sewer up to adoption standards, you must meet the costs. For further details on the way to proceed with a request for adoption, please contact us on **0845 717 1100**.

If you believe that we have unreasonably refused a request for adoption of a sewer or have set unreasonable conditions, you can appeal to Ofwat (see page 10 for contact details).

We strongly recommend that, if you are buying a property, you instruct your solicitor to verify whether any of the sewers are unadopted.

Alterations to existing pipework

If you are extending your home, building a conservatory or are making any alterations to your property which will require plumbing or drainage works, you must make sure that you connect to the correct private drainage system.





For example all bathroom and kitchen connections must be made to the foul drainage. Rain water guttering should connect to the surface water drainage system. The type of drainage system that exists can be confirmed by the local building control who will be able to give you advice about these matters. If you require any further advice or help please do not hesitate to contact our Customer Centre on **0845 717 1100**.

New connections to sewers

All domestic customers are entitled to connect their drains to our sewerage system, as long as this is practical and you meet the costs. You will need to provide us with details of the drain or sewer to be connected. We will let you know whether we accept your proposals and let you know what the costs will be.

We can refuse permission for new connections to our sewers if we think the connection will have a detrimental effect on them. For example, we will not allow a foul drain connection to a surface water sewer.

To guarantee the quality of the work, the connection to the public sewerage system must be carried out by one of our approved contractors. This decision will not only guarantee the quality of the works undertaken, but is necessary to ensure strict compliance with all relevant health and safety legislation.

Details of these contractors will be provided when your proposals have been accepted.

For each new connection you will have to pay:

- a fee to us to cover those costs incurred in dealing with the application prior to permission being granted
- an infrastructure charge. This is a fixed contribution towards additional investment in our local sewerage network. This helps us to ensure that we can continue to deliver the same high standard of service to all our customers, following the additional demand of a new connection. Ofwat sets the maximum infrastructure charge for a domestic supply.

Once we have agreed to you making the connection, and we have received payment of the charges, you should approach one or more of the approved contractors with the details which have been agreed, and request a quotation from them for making the connection. Payment for this work and a decision on when the job will be carried out, would be a private arrangement between you and the chosen approved contractor.



What if there is no existing sewer?

Sometimes a new sewer may be required because there may be no existing sewer we can use to serve your property. There are two main ways for us to provide new sewers. These are:

- by requisition (usually for new properties) using the Water Industry Act 1991, Section 98 where you do not have the powers to lay sewers through 3rd party land
- or:
- as part of our first time sewerage programme (usually for existing properties) using Section 101A of the Water Industry Act 1991.

Sewer requisitions

Where practicable, we will provide a newly requisitioned sewer as long as it serves two or more properties. However you and any other applicants must contribute towards the cost of the project. The cost will be the difference between the the income we will receive from waste water service charges over a 12 year period and our reasonable costs in providing the sewer. This is payable as a single lump sum prior to the sewer being provided or the

amount is payable over 12 years. We will also require some form of security before beginning the feasibility study and design work. Disputes about terms and conditions of requisition agreements including costs incurred can be referred to Ofwat for determination.

For our part we must provide the sewer within six months of agreeing the proposals and the associated costs and receiving payment.

In 2003 the Water Industry Act, 1991 was amended to allow customers to request lateral drainage connections from their properties to be requisitioned in the same manner. Disputes about the reasonable costs of providing lateral drains can be referred to Ofwat.

First time sewerage

Under the terms of the Water Industry Act 1991 we may be requested to provide a new sewer in an area which is not currently served by the public sewerage system and the local private system causes environmental problems. Any proposed scheme must satisfy certain technical, financial and environmental criteria to meet the requirements of the Act.

Further details about sewer requisitions or the provisions of the Water Industry Act 1991 can be obtained by contacting us on **0845 717 1100**.



Sewage treatment

Public sewers bring domestic and industrial waste waters to our sewage treatment works for treatment and safe discharge to the environment. After treatment, the cleaned water goes to a nearby watercourse or the sea and must comply with statutory consent conditions set by the Environment Agency.

The Environment Agency is a statutory body with its own powers and duties and was established by Government to protect and enhance the environment. It monitors the discharges to ensure compliance. These results are placed on a public register.

Sewage sludge is produced as a by-product of the sewage treatment process. The sludge is further treated and recycled (principally to agriculture), again in accordance with statutory requirements and approval by the Environment Agency.

We conduct our sewage treatment operations with the aim of avoiding or minimising any problems to the public. If you believe that any of our activities are causing you a problem, then please let us know by contacting us on [0845 717 1100](tel:08457171100).

What not to put down the sewer

Sewers are not waste disposal units. They are designed to carry water, liquid and solid bodily waste and toilet paper but increasing amounts of litter are being flushed down the toilet. By flushing away condoms, cotton buds, tights, disposable nappies, sanitary products and their packaging etc. you are likely to cause a problem in your drain or

the sewer. Blockages caused by these things can lead to flooding to properties or escapes of sewage to the environment.

So, think before you flush and bag it and bin it. If it doesn't need to go down the sewer put it in a bag and put it in your bin.

Sewers are also not the place for:

- unwanted oil and grease - they may be liquid in a warm kitchen but they quickly solidify and cause blockages when they enter a cold sewer
- medical supplies - colostomy bags, bandages, incontinence pads, syringes, medicines
- chemicals - other than those designed for use in kitchens and drains.

Instead you should:

- wait until cooking fat solidifies and then put it into a container and place in the bin
- pour cooking and engine oil into a strong container before disposal
- keep a separate bin for bathroom waste such as cotton buds, cotton wool and packaging from sanitary and other bathroom products.

If you would like a copy of our 'Bag it and bin it' or 'Stop and think, keep your sink on a fat-free drink!' leaflets, please contact us on [0845 717 1100](tel:08457171100).

Tree roots and building debris such as household bricks can also cause problems and blockages within public sewers and private drains which can subsequently result in flooding. It is advisable for customers who are concerned about trees or who have recently completed building work to carry out any relevant checks to ensure that their private drainage system is not being obstructed.



Protection against flooding from public sewers

Public sewers are designed to protect properties from the risk of flooding. Most combined sewers have storm overflows which are built to manage any heavy flows through the public sewer, and assist in protecting our homes and businesses from flooding.

Unfortunately, there are occasions when sewage flooding does occur. We understand the distress and inconvenience this may cause, particularly when sewage enters your home. Most sewage flooding incidents result from overloaded sewers following heavy rainfall, or blockages caused by misuse of the drainage system.

If you suffer sewage flooding we are here to help. Please immediately contact our freephone floodline on **0800 328 7648**.

We do our best to attend to a reported incident within three hours. However whilst all available resources will be provided to assist you, in the event of widespread damage as a result of storm conditions, our representatives initial visit will be to check the condition of the

sewers to ensure there are no blockages within the public sewerage system. Claims for loss or damage must be directed to your own household insurers who will provide advice as to what actions you should take to ensure the terms and conditions of your policy are met.

We are not legally liable for loss or damage by flooding from public sewers unless we have been negligent. If the cause of the problem is a blockage in our public sewer we will arrange for it to be cleared at our cost. If you would like to check the location of public sewers, contact us on **0845 717 1100**.

We aim to deal with problems relating to flooding promptly, and to assist as much as we can afterwards.

For further advice on what to do in the event of sewage flooding, please call **0845 717 1100** and ask for a copy of our leaflet 'Sewage flooding'.





Payments and guaranteed standards of service

If you are unfortunate enough to suffer flooding from one of our public sewers, we operate a scheme under our guaranteed standards of service called 'Our promise to you'. To request a copy of this leaflet, please call **0845 717 1100**. Our customer care package covers the service standards we promise to deliver. If we fail to meet any of these standards, we will pay you compensation.

The table (right) summarises the payments you may be entitled to if you suffer flooding from a public sewer.

There are instances when these guarantees do not apply:

- flooding caused by your actions (or the actions of a third party)
- blockage or fault on your own private sewer
- exceptional events (e.g. river inundation, run-off from adjacent land or severe rainfall conditions).

Please remember that you must let us know that you are affected. As long as we know, following the conclusion of any investigations which may be required, all these payments are automatic and will be made regardless of whether or not you are covered by insurance.

Internal flooding

If the inside of your property is flooded, your sewerage charge for the year the flooding happened will be refunded, or £100 whichever is the greater (up to a maximum of £1000).

Per repeat flooding

We will make a further payment equivalent to the amount of your sewerage charge for the year from a minimum of £100 up to a maximum of £1,000, for each incident.

External flooding

If the outside of your property is flooded, 25% of your sewerage charge for the year the flooding happened will be refunded, from a minimum of £25 (up to a maximum of £250).

Per repeat flooding

We will make a further payment equivalent to 25% of your sewerage charge for the year, from a minimum of £25 up to a maximum of £250 for each incident.



Putting it right

If you do have a problem and are not happy with our work or service we would like to hear from you. This gives us the opportunity to put things right and make improvements so that other customers can benefit.

If you would like further details on how to progress your complaint or would like a copy of our code of practice on 'Getting answers', please call us on **0845 717 1100**.

If we are unable to resolve your complaint, you can refer it to the Consumer Council for Water, which acts as a watchdog on your behalf. They will carry out a thorough review of your complaint and inform you of their findings.

The Consumer Council for Water operates through nine regional committees in England and a committee for Wales. They represent the interests of all customers of the water and sewerage companies in England and Wales. The Chairmen and members of the Consumer Council for Water committees are local people drawn from a wide range of backgrounds and experience.

In this region, The Consumer Council for Water can be contacted at:

**Consumer Council for
Water Northumbria
Eighth Floor
Northgate House
St Augustines Way
Darlington
DL1 1XA**

**Tel: 0845 708 9367
Fax: 01325 369 269
Email: northumbria@ccwater.org.uk**

**Ofwat
18th Floor, City Centre Tower
7 Hill Street
Birmingham
B5 4UA**

**Tel: 0121 625 1300
Fax: 0121 625 1400
Email: enquiries@ofwat.gsi.gov.uk
Minicom: 0121 625 1422**

A full description of the roles of both The Consumer Council for Water and Ofwat can be found in our leaflet 'Water and sewerage watchdogs'. Please contact us on **0845 717 1100** to obtain a copy.



How to contact us

0845 733 5566 for all billing enquiries Monday to Friday between 8am and 8pm and between 8am and 1pm on Saturday.

0845 717 1100 for all water and sewerage enquiries (24 hours).

To report a leak **0800 393 084** (freephone) 24 hours.

To report a flood **0800 328 7648** (freephone) 24 hours.

By minicom **0845 723 1254**.

We also accept calls from RNID Typetalk.

Contact us by email via our website www.nwl.co.uk

Language Line **0845 717 1100**. If English is not your first language, we offer a free translation service.

Finding out more

This leaflet forms part of our code of practice for domestic customers which provides customers with essential information about our company. All our codes are approved by Ofwat.

Other leaflets within our code of practice are available:

- **Our promise to you** (our service levels and how we will compensate you if things go wrong)
- **Getting answers** (who to contact and how we will manage your complaint)
- **Can we help you?** (a range of services for customers who need extra help)
- **Getting water to your home**
- **Dealing with leaks** (our code of practice on leakage, guidance on pipe ownership and our repair policy)
- **Your water meter**
- **Paying your water bill**
- **Managing debt** (our code of practice on debt)
- **Water and sewerage watchdogs** (who to contact for additional information)

To order any code of practice leaflet in Braille, large print, CD or on audio tape please call **0845 717 1100**.

We also offer information leaflets on sewer flooding, protecting the environment and water efficiency in the home and garden.



Northumbrian Water
Abbey Road
Pity Me
Durham
DH1 5FJ

www.nwl.co.uk

Printed on environmentally
friendly paper

March 07



**NORTHUMBRIAN
WATER**