



NORTHUMBRIAN
WATER



Dealing with leaks

Our code of practice: on leakage





Our code of practice on leakage

Here at Northumbrian Water we have a duty to all of our customers and to the environment to promote the wise use of water and to find and repair leaks as quickly as possible. We take this responsibility very seriously. Any waste of treated water also wastes the energy and other natural resources that are used to treat the water to ensure it meets the water quality standards and deliver it to you.

If you are charged for your water by meter, a leak on one of your pipes could lead to an unexpected, higher than normal bill. Because of this, we have procedures which cover when you don't have to pay for the lost water. Even if you are not on a meter, a leaking pipe is a waste of a precious resource. So now we fix most leaks on customers' pipes without charge, whether or not you have a meter. There are some restrictions to our free repair service and details of these are on pages four and seven of this leaflet.

The detailed procedures are set out here and form our code of practice which has been approved by Ofwat, the industry regulator.

We refer to 'domestic customers' and 'domestic premises' throughout this leaflet. These are defined as follows:

- 'Domestic customer' means the occupier of domestic premises.
- 'Domestic premises' means any premises used wholly or partly as a dwelling or intended for such use.

Northumbrian Water offers a one-off leak detection service for domestic customers. We provide up to four hours of leak detection investigations or advice free of charge during normal working hours (Monday to Friday 8am to 4pm). A charge may be incurred for work over and above these hours but we will agree this with you in advance.

We also offer a leak detection service to non-domestic customers, but this is not a free service and may be carried out by one of our service partners.

In this leaflet...

- Guidance on pipe ownership.
- Our policy on free repair of domestic customers' pipes.
- Our policy on checking for leaks when a meter is installed.
- Our policy on dealing with a large bill caused by a leak.



Guidance on pipe ownership

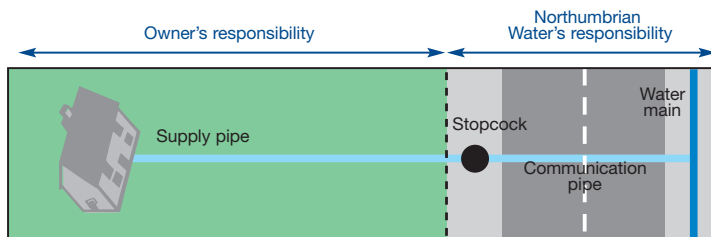


Diagram A shows which pipes belong to us and which to you

In most circumstances, Northumbrian Water owns the pipes in the road or pavement. This includes the pipe connecting the water main in the street to the stopcock or meter (which we also own) outside your property. We maintain these pipes and pay for repairs.

You (or your landlord) own all the pipes on your property. This includes underground pipes in your garden or driveway as well as the pipes inside the building. You (or your landlord) have to pay for any repairs to pipes and fittings inside the building, as well as repairs to any pipes outside which

aren't covered by our free repair policy, (see page four). This includes pipework laid in private ground owned by a third party.

In some cases, properties share a supply pipe, where the private part of the water supply serves several properties. This means it is jointly owned and if there is a problem, a number of customers may each have to pay a share of the costs in sorting out the problem. Sometimes this may mean that although only one customer has reported a leak or noticed a problem, a number of neighbours are affected and have to share any costs.

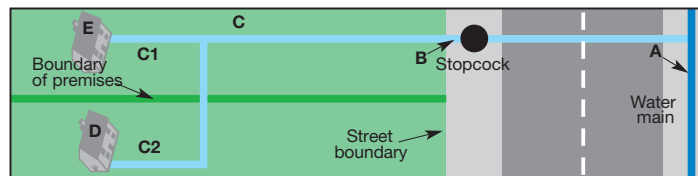


Diagram B shows an example of a shared supply

Key to pipe responsibility

Service element	Responsibility	
	Water company ownership	Maintenance
A - B Communication Pipe Stopcock	Yes Yes	The water company
B - C Shared supply pipe	No	D and E customers jointly
C - C1 and C - C2 Supply pipes and internal plumbing	No	D and E customers individually (D with consent from E in order to carry out necessary work on E's premises)

Sometimes it is difficult to tell who is responsible for a pipe, but we are always happy to advise you. You can ring us on **0845 717 1100**.



Our policy on free repairs

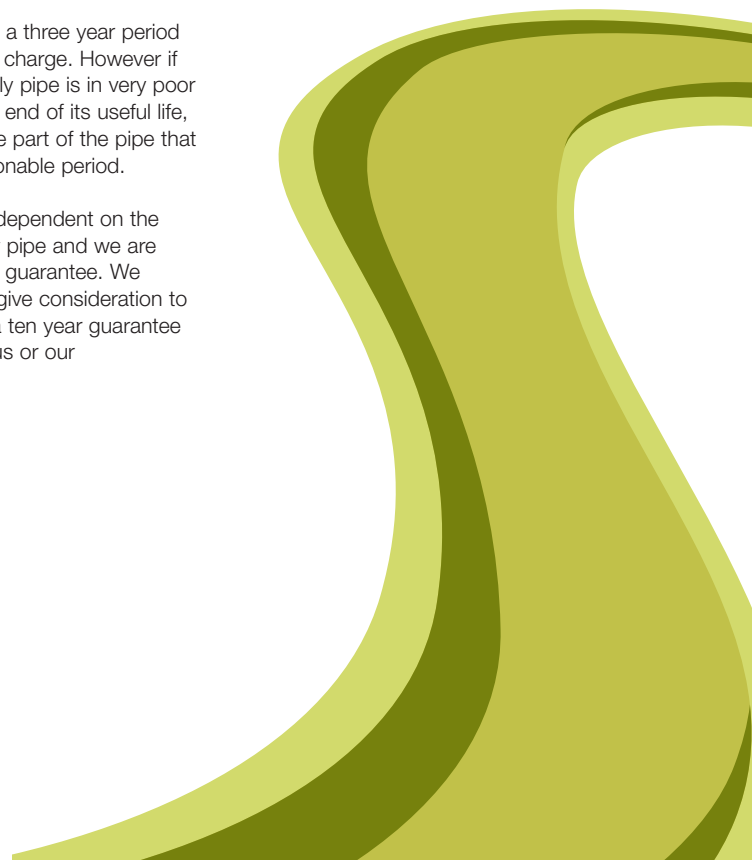
This applies to domestic customers. In many cases we will fix leaks on your underground pipes free of charge.

We will do this if:

- The supply pipe has an outside diameter of up to 25mm (this applies to most domestic properties).
- We find a leak less than 1.35m down. If we need to dig further we will discuss this with you first, as we will make a charge for this extra work.
- The supply pipes are no more than 50m in length, measured from the stopcock in the highway.
- The pipes are not under or immediately adjacent to buildings or structures (including sheds, patios, decking etc).
- We are not prevented from excavation by the presence of drains or other utility services, or a requirement to provide some form of structural support.
- The problem is on an external pipe (for internal pipes you should call a plumber).

We will repair one leak within a three year period for the same property free of charge. However if we determine that your supply pipe is in very poor condition or has reached the end of its useful life, we may ask you to renew the part of the pipe that belongs to you within a reasonable period.

The success of the repair is dependent on the age and quality of the supply pipe and we are therefore unable to provide a guarantee. We recommend that customers give consideration to pipe renewal, which carries a ten year guarantee if the work is carried out by us or our service partners.





Pipe renewal

In some circumstances if you prefer, we may be able to arrange for the renewal of your supply pipe at a subsidised rate instead of a repair. This work would normally be carried out by our service partners.

Please note that we will not offer a subsidised renewal if we have already carried out a free repair to your supply pipe within the last three years. However we will provide a fixed price quotation if you would like us to carry out the work.

The charge for the renewal will depend on the specific circumstances, such as length of the connection and surface type, (concrete/tarmac/turf) or amount of excavation required. We will only charge the price quoted, less the cost of an average supply pipe repair. Our renewals carry a ten year guarantee.

In certain areas where shared supplies are known to be in poor condition and we are pro-active in the renewal of supply pipes, we will offer a subsidised replacement rather than a free repair.

After repair or renewal we promise the following:

- Once we have finished our work we will fill in any holes we have dug.
- In grass areas, we will relay the turf we have lifted but we will not provide new turf.
- In made-up areas (such as concrete or tarmac paths and drives, patios etc.) we will provide a temporary tarmac surface.

Please note we are not responsible for final finishing and matching.

Lead pipes

If your home was built before 1970 it may have lead pipes. We have an obligation to ensure the water supplied to your property meets the current standard and the standard for lead which will come into force in 2013, but you may still want to consider replacing them.

We have a policy called 'Our Water Quality Standards and Replacing your Lead Pipes', which explains how we will replace our communication pipe at no cost to you when you replace your lead supply pipe.

If you let us know that you intend to replace your lead supply pipe, we will arrange for the replacement of our communication pipe at no cost to you when you replace your supply pipe.

Contact us on **0845 717 1100** for guidance or you can download the policy and application form from our website **www.nwl.co.uk**.



Electrical earthing installations to your water supply

For many years, earthing connections were often made to an earth electrode buried in the ground and attached to the incoming metal water pipe. This method of earthing was deemed safe until 1966, when it became unacceptable to rely on the incoming metal water pipe as the earthing point for electrical installations. All new and replacement water pipes are made from non-conductive material and will not provide an electrical earth. When alterations, extensions and repairs are carried out on your water service to your property or on our mains in the vicinity, the electrical installation in the property may become dangerous. We do not accept responsibility for your electrical installation.

In modern homes, electrical installations including boilers, cookers, storage heaters and central heating pipes are connected to an earth point, usually at the electricity meter.

Correct earthing and bonding is vital for the safety of an electrical installation, and it is the customers', or property owners' responsibility to ensure that it is effective without relying on the incoming metal pipe.

If an earthing point is available at your meter, you are strongly advised to use it. You can find out if you have an earth point, or if one can be provided, by contacting your Electricity Supplier, Electricity Distribution Company or a competent electrician. They are able to inspect your electrical installation and will give you an estimate for any work necessary to bring the earthing (and bonding) arrangements in your house up to a safe standard as required by present regulations.

For more information contact your electricity provider.



What if the leak does not qualify for a free repair or subsidised renewal?

If there is a leak on a supply pipe that does not qualify for a free repair (for example, if it is internal or underneath the house or garage or if we have repaired the pipe within the last three years) then it is the property owners' responsibility to repair it. At this stage we will issue a Waste Water Notice.

If the owner(s) then fail to repair the leak in accordance with the timescale set out in the Waste Water Notice, Section 75 (9) (a) and (b) of the Water Industry Act 1991, then Northumbrian Water has the power to carry out the repair or renewal and charge any reasonable cost to the owner(s).

In addition, if there is water running to waste or causing damage, we are within our rights to carry out a repair or even turn the water off in extreme circumstances.

Our policy on free repairs also applies to shared supplies (see page three). We may need to get agreement from several customers who share the pipe and the offer of any free repair or subsidised renewal is subject to everyone involved giving us the permission we need to carry out the work. The same conditions apply as for normal supply pipes.



Paying for water using a meter

All domestic customers have the right to ask for a meter to be fitted to their supply at no direct charge to themselves, to enable them to pay by the volume of water used. There are three possible locations for the installation of the meter:

- Inside your property boundary, e.g. in the garden.
- In the footpath outside your property boundary.
- Inside your property, near the stopcock.

The preferred location for the meter is in an existing boundary box. If you want the meter installed in a different place, we can discuss this with you but we may request that you pay any additional costs incurred as a result of selecting a different location before the meter can be fitted.

Checking for leaks when we install a meter

At the time when a meter is installed, we will check the supply pipe between the meter and your tap to establish if there is a leak in that pipe. Where as a result of that check a leak is detected in the supply pipe which can be repaired without additional excavation at the time the meter is installed, we will repair the leak at our expense. Where as a result of that check a leak is detected which cannot be repaired without additional excavation, we will notify you of the leak and ask you to repair it at your expense. If you fail to repair the leak, we are entitled to treat any subsequent loss of water from the leak as consumption, and charge you for this lost water.

If a leak is discovered during the installation and you do not qualify for a free repair and choose not to pay us to repair it, we will continue to fit the meter and issue a Waste Water Notice.





Leaks on a metered water supply

If you have a meter, you pay for the water which passes through it. Even a small leak on your supply may result in a much higher bill than you were expecting.

To avoid large bills caused by leakages, we recommend that you take regular readings so that you get to know the amount of water you use. This practice could also help identify early on if you have a leak.

If there is a leak on one of your external pipes and it is covered by our free repair policy, then we will give you a full allowance for the lost water. Leakage allowances are only granted to domestic premises.

If the leak is external and is not covered by our free repair policy, then as with all private leaks not covered by the policy we will issue a Waste Water Notice. We will only give you the allowance if the leak is repaired within the timescale stipulated in the Notice. An allowance will not be granted if you were aware of the leak and have not repaired it or if the leak was due to your negligence.

If a change in consumption is identified on a metered supply that is a result of a leak, we will backdate the allowance to that point. In normal circumstances, leakage allowances will be granted for the meter reading cycle period plus one month. On occasions, allowances may be granted for a longer period.

If we grant a leakage allowance, it is normally based on your past consumption. If there is no record of how much water you have used in the past, we are required to base the adjustment on the typical use for a similar property.

If you have recently had a leak fixed and think you may be entitled to an allowance, call us on **0845 733 5566**.

After the leak has been fixed, you may find that your actual usage is significantly different from our estimate. If your actual usage is significantly lower, we will consider granting a further leakage allowance. If your actual usage is considerably higher, then we would not normally ask you to pay the difference.

Please call us on **0845 733 5566** if you would like us to review the leakage allowance in the light of your actual use.

We do not give a leakage allowance in the following circumstances:

- To non-domestic customers.
- If the leak is internal.
- If the leak was caused by your negligence.
- If you knew about the leak but failed to arrange for its timely repair.





Please note:

- In normal circumstances, leakage allowances will be granted for the meter reading cycle period plus one month.
- Leakage allowances are granted once per customer per property. However in certain exceptional circumstances more than one allowance may be granted.
- If we grant you a leakage allowance for lost water, you will also receive an allowance for the associated sewerage costs, providing that the water has not entered the sewerage system. This sewerage allowance is normally also available to non-domestic customers, in contrast to the leakage allowance.
- For mixed use properties i.e. those properties which have only a single water supply and are jointly occupied by both domestic customers and non-domestic customers, an allowance will be granted where the property is principally used as a domestic premises. Where principal use of the property is non-domestic, we will grant a partial allowance to ensure that a domestic customer is not disadvantaged.

A simple leak check

You can carry out a simple check to see if you have a leak. Take a meter reading and make sure there are no taps or other water using appliances running in your house. Wait an hour and take another reading. If the reading has increased, you may have a leak.

Contact us on **0845 717 1100** for guidance.





And finally...

Our network of pipes is vast and it is impossible for us to monitor it all the time.

If you spot a leak in the street, don't just ignore it, please let us know. Call our leak line on **0800 393 084** (freephone - 24 hours).

We have teams throughout the region whose major responsibility is to identify and repair leaks. But we very much appreciate it when customers alert us to a leak in their neighbourhood which we may not have registered. We will fix the leak as soon as we can whilst trying to minimise disruption to householders or road users.

You can check for leaks by looking for damp areas on the ground in dry weather, lush vegetation during hot weather, reduced water flow or noise on your water pipes.

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:

- Managing debt (our code of practice on debt).
- Getting answers (who to contact and how we will manage your complaint).
- Can we help you? (register for a range of services we offer to customers who need extra help).
- Our promise to you (our service levels and how we will compensate you if things go wrong).
- Your water meter.
- Getting water to your home.
- Sewerage services.

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

We also offer leaflets on water efficiency in the home and garden, and free Save-a-flush bags which fit in your toilet cistern.

To order any of these, please call **0845 717 1100**.





How to contact us

Leakage hotline – to report a leak outside:
0800 393 084 (freephone – 24 hours)

Billing and account enquiries:
0845 733 5566
8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and
8am to 1pm on Saturdays

Non billing and service enquiries:
0845 717 1100 (24 hours)

By email via our website:
www.nwl.co.uk

Complaints

If you have a complaint about any aspect of our service, please tell us either by phone, email or in writing.

If you are not happy with our response, you can contact the local office of the Consumer Council for Water (CCWater) which will act on your behalf.

Free phone flood line:
0800 328 7648

Minicom:
A minicom text facility is available for people with speech or hearing difficulties on **0845 723 1254**.

We also accept calls from RNID Typetalk.

Language line:
If English is not your first language, we offer a free translation service on **0845 310 9900**.

The address is:
Consumer Council for Water (CCWater)
Eighth Floor
Northgate House
St Augustine's Way
Darlington
DL1 1XA

Telephone:
0845 708 9367 Lo-call
01325 464222 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday

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Northumbria@ccwater.org.uk

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