



Sewer flooding

Guidance in the event of sewer flooding

Northumbrian Water appreciates that dealing with the impact of a flood is always difficult and we sympathise with the undoubted distress caused by a sewer flooding event.

Northumbrian Water or one of our approved contractors will visit your home following a reported flooding incident to offer practical on site help.

However, in the event of widespread damage as a result of a storm, whilst our representatives will inspect the public sewerage system and clear any associated blockages, it is not always possible for them to visit individual homes on that same day.

It is therefore essential that you know what to do if your home is threatened by sewer flooding.

Northumbrian Water has compiled this guidance leaflet, in consultation with the Consumer Council for Water who independently represent the interests of our customers, to provide practical advice and information. It also sets out the company's responsibility and commitment to help you, the role of an insurance company and a checklist of actions and contacts.

Whilst we cannot promise that you will not suffer flooding in the future, we do believe that this leaflet can help you to deal with the impact of sewer flooding more effectively. Please take the time to read it.

Does sewer flooding pose a health risk?

Sewage largely consists of water and domestic waste from bathrooms and kitchens.

During wet weather it is likely to be highly diluted by rainwater. If you adopt normal basic hygiene precautions and follow the instructions provided, you are unlikely to be at any increased health risk.

- Wear rubber gloves when clearing up floodwater damage, watch out for glass, nails and other sharp objects.
- Use waterproof dressings to cover cuts and wounds.
- Always wash hands after exposure.
- Wash and treat footwear with a mild disinfectant.
- Keep children and pets out of the contaminated area.

In the unlikely event of you feeling unwell, we recommend you visit your GP as a precautionary measure and explain that your property has recently been flooded.

You can also contact your local Environmental Health Department for independent advice following a flooding event.

What to do if you suffer flooding?

It is essential, and in your best interest, to contact your household insurance company immediately to inform them of a flooding incident. If you have suffered any loss or damage your insurers will provide advice as to what actions you need to take to ensure the terms of your policy are met.

If the flood water is in danger of reaching your electricity and/or gas points, ensure your gas and electricity supplies are turned off/isolated.

Please also telephone our freephone floodline on 0800 328 7648.

Please provide as much information as you can so that we can accurately record details of the flooding event. Be aware that our customer advisors may ask additional questions to ensure we have all of the information needed to prioritise your call effectively.

If the problem is thought to be with one of our sewers, arrangements will be made for one of our sewerage teams (Northumbrian Water or one of our approved contractors) to make an initial visit. We will try to attend reports of flooding to the inside of your property within six hours. However, in the event of severe storms and widespread flooding it will take our representatives longer to attend.

In this event, we will inform you of the problems being encountered due to the number of calls being received and if possible give you an indication of when we hope to attend. Customers who have suffered flooding to the inside of their home will receive priority assistance.

If you suffer flooding to the inside of your home

Northumbrian Water's clean up service

Whilst all available resources will be provided to assist you, in the event of widespread damage as a result of a storm, our representatives initial visit will be to check the condition of the sewers to ensure there are no blockages within the public sewerage system.

If any blockages are detected these will be immediately cleared to allow the flooding to begin to subside. During this visit our representatives will also assess the extent and number of properties affected by the flooding incident.

This will enable us to further prioritise the assistance we are able to offer and subsequently aid the clean up operations, which will begin once the flooding has abated.

Once the flooding has completely subsided our representatives will return to all of the areas affected to offer practical on site assistance.

This process may take several days to complete depending on the number of properties involved.

In the unlikely event that your insurance company has not implemented a detailed clean up operation in accordance with your policy, our representatives, having assessed your needs, will help to remove sewage debris and effluent from your property to the best of our ability.

Whilst we are unable to provide a clean up service which will meet that offered by your own insurers, in the event of you not possessing household insurance or your policy not providing adequate cover, we will offer to provide additional assistance in an attempt to minimise your losses.

We will, with your consent, call in a specialist contractor who will be asked to remove all floor coverings and commence the drying out process.

As a gesture of goodwill, Northumbrian Water will not charge you for the additional assistance provided by the specialist company.

Please be aware, however, that this assistance will not cover any additional costs incurred, such as increased electricity charges etc, which would normally be covered by your household insurance policy.

Further clean up measures you will need to undertake

Tests by the Water Research Centre have established that by using the following disinfecting approach, all traces of bacteria will be removed within 24 to 48 hours.

- Remove all soft furnishings and fittings that are damaged beyond repair once your insurance company has inspected the damaged items and agreed to their removal.
- Remove all dirty water and silt from the property, including the space under the floorboards, if you have them.
- Wash down all hard surfaces with hot soapy water until they look clean. Leave them to dry.
- Use a domestic disinfectant, to wash over all hard surfaces after cleaning.
- Food preparation surfaces, storage cupboards, refrigerators etc. should be washed down with a food safe disinfectant.
- Low level heating and good ventilation will help to speed up the drying process.
- Clothing, bedding and other soft/fabric articles, including children's toys should be laundered on a hot wash (minimum of 60°C) to destroy any germs that may be present.

- Your local authority will dispose of any bulky household furniture items that cannot be salvaged. Some local authorities offer this service free of charge. Please contact your own local authority to check if charges apply.
- If any electricity circuit or equipment has been immersed, a qualified electrician will need to check the safety of the system and appliances.

Preventing further contamination to your home

- Do not wipe over disinfected areas, as this will reduce the disinfectant's effectiveness.
- Where possible, windows should be opened to help eliminate disinfectant odours.
- Do not turn the heating up, as higher room temperatures may prolong the life of bacteria.
- If you need to enter any affected rooms within 48 hours of the internal clean up, you are advised to adopt normal basic hygiene precautions (as outlined in the section 'Does sewage flooding pose a health risk?' on page 2/3).

If you suffer flooding to the outside of your home

Northumbrian Water's clean up service

Whilst all available resources will be provided to assist you, in the event of widespread damage as a result of a storm, our representatives initial visit will be to check the condition of the sewers to ensure there are no blockages within the public sewerage system.

If any blockages are detected these will be immediately cleared to allow the flooding to begin to subside.

During this visit our representatives will also assess the extent and number of properties affected by the flooding incident.

This will enable us to further prioritise the assistance we are able to offer and subsequently aid the clean up operations that will begin once the flooding has abated.

Once the flooding has completely subsided our representatives will return to all of the areas affected to offer practical on site assistance. This process may take several days to complete depending on the number of properties involved.

Lawns and borders

It is not normal practice to apply disinfectant as this can kill plants and do more harm than good.

As most contaminants are on or near the surface, they will be exposed to the sun's ultra violet radiation, which is very effective in killing bacteria.

Laboratory testing has also shown that the best long-term treatment is to allow nature to take its course.

If the ground is particularly water logged it may be necessary to leave the clean up for a day or two to avoid disturbing the ground and spreading the contamination.

Hard surfaces

Hard surfaces such as paths and drives will be washed down and disinfected.

We suggest that you keep off these areas for three hours to give the disinfectant time to take effect.

What happens to your garden if it has been flooded?

The bacterial contamination will die off naturally during the days following the flooding and after an appropriate quarantine period the garden should be safe to resume normal activities.

Factors that influence bacterial decay periods include climatic conditions such as temperature and moisture, vegetation, soil type etc.

Independent laboratory tests carried out by the Water Research Centre have shown that bacteria should reduce to normal background levels as follows:

- **9 days** during warm dry summer conditions
- **20 days** during damper, cooler spring/autumnal conditions
- **25 days** during wet, cold winter conditions.

Preventing further contamination to your garden

It is important that you do not attempt to dig or rake the affected area as this will spread the contamination further into the soil or turf, where the life of the bacteria will be enhanced due to the lack of sunlight and the damp conditions.

We also recommend that any home grown garden produce (i.e. fruit and vegetables) contaminated by flood water is uprooted and destroyed as a precautionary measure.

Following a flooding event

Northumbrian Water will contact you following a flooding incident to carry out a flooding assessment. These assessments form an important part of our investigations as they help us to build an accurate picture of what happened before, during and after the flooding.

Customers hold valuable information having experienced the flooding first hand and we will either visit, telephone or write to you to discuss the flooding encountered. Your help is greatly appreciated and any information given will be dealt with in strict confidence and used to help us target further investigations more accurately.

The information you provide will also be used to determine whether you are entitled to any payment under our customer care scheme.

We may not be able to identify and make a payment under our customer care scheme without a flooding assessment being completed.

Do you require any special assistance?

If you or a member of your family require any special assistance please let us know straight away. This will help us when prioritising a visit to your home by one of our sewerage teams.

If, for example, you have mobility problems or are visually impaired it is likely that you would find it very difficult to exit your home in complete safety as a result of water ingress. If we are aware that you require special assistance and you inform us that you are being flooded, we will be able to prioritise your call more effectively. We will ensure that you receive on site assistance to help you safely vacate your home if no one is nearby to help you.

For more information or to record your details on our special assistance register, please contact our Customer Centre on **0845 717 1100**, who will be happy to help or register via our website www.nwl.co.uk

If you would prefer to have this leaflet in large print, audio cassette, CD or Braille, please contact our Customer Centre on **0845 717 1100**.

Preventative measures and self help guide

Whilst Northumbrian Water offers a clean up service to customers who have suffered flooding from one of our sewers, there are some measures you can take now to try and prevent water entering your property.

Also listed are some points you may like to consider, to minimise any unnecessary losses as a result of flooding.

- Have a supply of sandbags or floorboards ready to block driveways, gateways, doorways and airbricks. You can purchase sandbags from local builders merchants or you can make them yourself by using old pillowcases or carrier bags filled with sand or earth. Please be aware that, once made up, sandbags will decay over time. It is therefore essential that you regularly inspect and replace sandbags which have deteriorated to ensure that your sandbags are useful in the event of flooding.
- Make up a 'flood kit'. We suggest you include this leaflet, a torch, blankets, waterproof clothing, wellingtons, first-aid kit, rubber gloves and key personal documents (eg insurance details). Once prepared keep the 'flood kit' upstairs or in a high place downstairs if you live on one level.
- Make sure you know where to turn off your gas and electricity supply.
- Ensure treasured and irreplaceable items such as photographs and keepsakes are kept upstairs or in a high place downstairs if you live on one level.
- Keep medication within easy reach.

How to contact us

If you require any additional information or would like to make a complaint, you can do so using one of the following methods:

By telephone
0845 717 1100

In writing to
Northumbrian Water
PO Box 200
Durham
DH1 9WG

Via our website
www.nwl.co.uk

If you would like more information on our complaints procedure, please do not hesitate to contact our Customer Centre on the above telephone number.

As well as providing detailed information over the telephone, we can also send you Northumbrian Water's complaints leaflet entitled 'Getting answers', which is also available on our website.

This leaflet outlines our internal complaints procedure and also explains the role of our regulator the Consumer Council for Water. Having exhausted Northumbrian Water's complaints procedure, should you wish to have your complaint independently reviewed, you can do so by contacting the Consumer Council for Water directly. You will find their contact details on page 11.

Our guaranteed standards of service

Whilst Northumbrian Water are generally not liable for sewer flooding we are sympathetic to the problems flooding can create. In recognition of this we have incorporated sewer flooding in our customer care scheme.

For more detailed information about the payments you may be entitled to under this scheme, or to request a copy of our leaflet 'Our promise to you', please telephone our Customer Centre on **0845 717 1100**, who will be happy to help.

Alternatively, please visit our website for a copy of this leaflet.

If you do not have household insurance and have suffered losses as a result of sewer flooding, you may be able to secure some help through our emergency fund.

This fund was set up to offer financial help to customers who suffer loss or damage when Northumbrian Water has no strict liability.

Each application is considered individually and you can get an application form from our Customer Centre.

Useful contact information

Having provided contact information for ourselves and our regulator, Consumer Council for Water, we recommend that you take the time to enter contact telephone numbers for the following.

You will find this very useful in a flooding situation.

Northumbrian Water

Northumbrian Water
PO Box 200
Durham
DH1 9WG

Via our website
www.nwl.co.uk

Customer Centre

0845 717 1100

Freephone floodline

0800 328 7648

Consumer Council for Water

Eighth Floor
Northgate House
St Augustines Way
Darlington
DL1 1XA

By email to
northumbria@ccwater.org.uk

Consumer Council for Water

0845 708 9367

Local Authority

Telephone Company

Local Police

Building Insurance Company

Electricity Company

Household Insurance Company

Gas Company

Local Fire Brigade

Northumbrian Water
Abbey Road
Pity Me
Durham
DH1 5FJ

www.nwl.co.uk

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