

# **WHAT TO DO**

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if you experience sewer flooding

Flooding from sewers is extremely distressing and although we are working to reduce the risk of it happening, we can't always prevent it.

This leaflet offers guidance and advice on what to do if you have suffered flooding and also explains the main causes of flooding and what you can do to help reduce the risk of it happening again.

## **WHO TO CONTACT IF YOUR PROPERTY HAS FLOODED**

### **YOUR INSURER**

It is important that you contact your insurance provider straight away to tell them about any damage caused by the flooding. If you do not do this, it may affect any insurance claims you need to make. It will also help to speed up your insurance provider's response which may include assisting you with clearing out damaged items.

### **NORTHUMBRIAN WATER**

Telephone our 24 hour emergency freephone floodline number on **0800 328 7648**. When you contact us, it would be helpful if you can tell us if any other properties near you have been affected so we can help them too.

# ATTENDING YOUR PROPERTY

When you tell us that you have sewer flooding inside your property, we will attend within four hours. When you tell us that you have sewer flooding outside your property we will attend on the same day.

Customers who experience sewer flooding to the inside of their property will receive priority assistance. In all cases we will call you to let you know that we are on our way, so please ensure that you give us your preferred contact number.

Please be aware that, in the event of widespread storms and flooding, it may take us longer to attend but whenever possible we will let you know our estimated response time.

When we arrive on site, we will provide you with help and advice. We will ask you some additional questions about the flooding you have experienced to help us identify what caused the flooding. We will check our sewers and take photographs of the flooding for our records.

As our sewers are underground, we may need to use video camera equipment to check the inside of our sewers. The camera records images of the pipe as it moves along our sewer and any problems that are found to be causing or making the sewer flooding worse will be repaired.

# WHAT YOU CAN DO

## REDUCING THE IMPACT OF REPEAT FLOODING

If you have been unfortunate enough to experience sewer flooding before, you should take the following precautions to reduce the impact of any further flooding, especially if you feel that flooding is likely or imminent:

- Move any valuable items and important documents to a safe, higher place.
- If water levels are rising, switch off gas and electricity supplies if safe to do so.
- Place wet towels against the bottom of doors.
- Plug sinks, shower trays etc – weigh down the plugs to prevent water flowing back up the drains.
- Move furniture upstairs if this can be done safely.

## DURING OR AFTER YOU HAVE BEEN FLOODED

If it is safe to do so, it would be helpful if you take photographs of the flooded area using your mobile phone or camera, as this may have subsided by the time we arrive. As well as helping us to understand how the flooding happened, your photographs will allow us to consider if you are entitled to a payment under our guaranteed standards of service.

Any photographs should be shown to us when we arrive at your property.

## CLEANING UP

### Internal flooding

If the inside of your property has been flooded and after informing your insurance company you decide to start the clean-up, you should take the following precautions:

- Wear protective clothing such as rubber gloves and wellingtons.
- Protect any cuts and grazes.

### External flooding

We want to help you to put things right as external flooding is not covered under insurance.

If you have experienced sewer flooding to the outside of your property, we will cleanse, wash down and disinfect all hard standing areas such as paths or yards. If the ground is waterlogged, we may need to leave the clean up for a day or two to avoid disturbing the ground and spreading the contamination.

As most contaminants are on or near the surface, they will be open to the sun's ultra violet rays, which are very effective at killing bacteria. Independent laboratory tests have shown that bacteria should reduce to normal levels in line with the timescales shown below.

<b>DAYS</b>	<b>CONDITIONS</b>
9	During warm dry summer conditions
20	During damper cooler spring/autumn conditions
25	During wet cold winter conditions

We will keep you (and your retailer where necessary) updated through our investigations and what we intend to do to address the sewer flooding problem.

# **GUARANTEED STANDARDS OF SERVICE (GSS) PAYMENT**

## **INTERNAL FLOODING**

In recognition of the distress and inconvenience experienced if the inside of your property is flooded from one of our sewers, you are entitled to an amount equal to our full sewerage charge for the year or £150, whichever is more (up to a maximum of £1,000) in line with our Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS). All payments will be paid through your retailer.

## **EXTERNAL FLOODING**

To make sure that customers who have experienced sewer flooding are treated fairly, we will assess the impact that the flooding has had on your property. You will be entitled to a payment under our GSS if the flood water has impacted you in one or more of the following ways:

- Entered an outbuilding such as a detached garage.
- Caused any damage to permanent structures such as decking.
- Restricted access to your property.
- Affected an area greater than two metres by two metres (six feet six inches by six feet six inches).

If you are entitled to a payment, an amount equal to 50% of our sewerage charge for the year or £75, whichever is more (up to a maximum of £500) will be made through your retailer in line with GSS. Both internal and external flooding payments form part of our GSS and do not represent compensation or an admission of liability. To be eligible for a payment, you must tell us or your retailer about the sewer flooding within three months of the incident.

As mentioned earlier, it would be useful if you could take some photographs of the flooding and show them to us when we visit you. This will help us to determine the GSS payment if there is no flood water present when we attend site and we can then make sure the correct payment is raised quickly.

If we do not make these payments to your retailer within 20 working days of being notified of the flooding event, we will pay you an additional £50 through your retailer.

### **WHEN WE CAN'T MAKE A PAYMENT**

We are unable to make a payment in the following circumstances:

- If the flooding is caused by you.
- If the flooding is caused by exceptional rainfall events.
- If our investigations confirm that the flooding was as a result of third party issues eg surface water running over land, river inundation, private drainage or highway drainage.

### **CAUSES OF SEWER FLOODING**

Sewer flooding can sometimes occur during or after periods of heavy rain when our sewers are unable to cope with the amount of water falling. More commonly, how we use the system and what we put down the drain causes sewer flooding. A large number of flooding problems can be prevented by following these simple guidelines:

#### **Wipes and Non flushable Products**

Items that claim to be flushable such as wipes and sanitary products, may look like they disappear when they are flushed, but they don't break down like toilet paper does when they get past the U-bend.

These items block up pipes and can cause blockages.

### **Help keep your drains clear**

Placing wipes, sanitary products in a bin rather than down the toilet.

### **Kitchen Fats, Oils and Grease**

Fat and grease should never be poured down the plug hole, as when they cool, they harden inside the sewer and can cause blockages.

### **Help keep your drains clear**

Allowing kitchen grease to cool down and then scrape it into a bin before washing up. Remember to scrape residues from plates, roasting tins and pans into the bin too before washing. If cooking oil remains in liquid form once cool, pour it into an empty container and put in bin.

### **Commercial kitchens**

Commercial kitchens should install a suitably sized grease trap to ensure fats, oils and grease are captured before the wash down water enters the sewer.

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If you have any queries, please contact your Case Advisor or our Contact Centre on **0345 717 1100**.

For billing queries, please contact your retailer directly.

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