

# Environmental Information Regulations 2004

## Charging Scheme

### Free access

The purpose behind the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 [EIR] is to encourage access to environmental information held by public authorities to assist an informed public debate.

Independently of EIR, we already provide free access to a wide range of environmental information in the following ways:

- on our website
- by access to public registers which we hold
- at our offices to inspect information.

Several of our sites offer the public computer access to information, and members of our team will be happy to help you with this. Please let us know if you wish to make use of this facility and we can make suitable arrangements for you.

We are continually adding to the information which is electronically available. However, if you want something which you cannot find online, you can contact us at [eir@nwl.co.uk](mailto:eir@nwl.co.uk) to request this.

### Charges

This EIR Charging Scheme has been drafted on the basis of the Information Commissioner's guidance which can be found at <https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1627/charging-for-environmental-information-reg8.pdf>

The ICO guidance states that charges can be made for the following items:-

- staff time spent on preparing information to be supplied including location; retrieval; extraction and formatting; and
- printing, copying and postage.

The currently approved recovery rate for staff time under EIR is £25 per hour. Northumbrian Water therefore bases its charges on this rate.

No charges can be made for our considering whether we hold the information you request, nor our deciding whether it can be released in accordance with EIR rules.

## **When we charge**

If information cannot be accessed via public registers or is not already available online (see **Free Access** above), then a charge may be made in accordance with the EIR provisions.

Routine charging for access to environmental information might have the effect of deterring requesters and would not be in accordance with the underlying EIR ethos.

Most EIR requests which we receive (c. 98%) are dealt with in under four hours. Given this, we offer all requesters the first four hours free of charge. Charges will only be raised for requests which will take more than four hours.

We offer advice and assistance to applicants throughout to help them narrow down the scope of their request and avoid, or reduce, any charges.

## **When we will not charge**

No charges will be made for any request, however long it may take, if you make us aware that you:

- are receiving any financial support from NWL, such as a flexible payment plan; Water Direct; WaterSure, Bill cap scheme, payment breaks or similar
- are registered on our Priority Services Register
- are a registered charity
- have made a request where it is in the public interest to waive charges.

## **Notification of fee**

If it will take us longer than four hours to answer your request, we will give you the best estimate we have of the likely time and cost before any work is undertaken.

If it turns out that we have underestimated the cost, we will absorb this additional element. You will only be charged the sum specified. If we have overestimated, we will refund you the excess.

When you make a request, we will issue you with a fee notice. This will detail the tasks involved in responding to your request, and associated costs. No work is undertaken before you have confirmed that you are happy to go ahead.

## **Advance payment**

Where a charge will be levied, we notify you in advance of the charge and do not undertake the work until you have accepted the charge and paid. The regulatory response timetable for EIR information will be suspended until this is paid.