



Our Code of Practice

Your water company



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This leaflet forms part of our Customer Code of Practice, which outlines the services we provide for household customers. It has been produced in compliance with our licence.

Contents

The regulators	4
Water quality	6
Water resources	8
Water pressure	10
Interruptions to water supplies	11
Water efficiency	11
New connections	12
Responsibility for pipes	14

Introduction

Your water company

South East Water is responsible for supplying clean safe drinking water to over 2.2 million people. We do this by taking water from rivers, reservoirs and underground sources called aquifers. The amount of water we are permitted to take from the environment is managed through abstraction licences issued by the Environment Agency. We then treat the water to the highest standards set by the independent Drinking Water Inspectorate before distributing it through 14,500km of water mains – that's enough pipe to go around the M25 74 times.

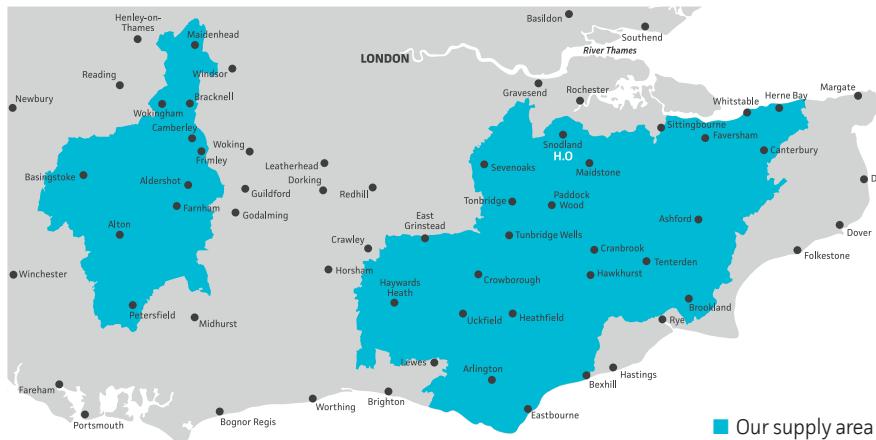
We are committed to supplying wholesome drinking water round the clock, helping conserve water resources, finding and preventing leaks, protecting the environment and guaranteeing standards of service for customers.

We work hard to deliver great customer service and meet regularly with the Consumer Council for Water, which represents customers' interests, to see what further improvements can be made.

Our customer service performance is also regulated by Ofwat.

Area of operation

Our supply area covers 5,700 square kilometres of parts of Kent, Sussex, Hampshire, Surrey and Berkshire, and safeguarding the environment is at the heart of South East Water's operations.



Wastewater services

South East Water provides the drinking water supply service to your home. Depending on where you live, wastewater services are provided by either Thames Water or Southern Water.

If you have a problem with your wastewater service, such as a blockage or flooding, please contact your wastewater company:

Thames Water: thameswater.co.uk Tel: 0800 316 9800*

or

Southern Water: southernwater.co.uk Tel: 0330 303 0368

We bill customers for wastewater services on behalf of Thames Water and Southern Water. Where applicable, this will be indicated on our bills. In these cases, queries about wastewater charges would be handled by our Customer Services team using the contact details on the back of this leaflet.

* See Thames Water's website for details of call charges

The regulators

South East Water's services are regulated in a number of areas. This is a guide to who our regulators are, what they do and how you can contact them.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs – Defra

Defra deals with all aspects of policy relating to the water industry and we operate under a licence granted by the Secretary of State.

Defra also approves water companies' 25 year Water Resources Management Plans.

You can contact Defra at:

Customer Contact Unit, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR

Email: defra.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Website: defra.gov.uk

Tel: 03459 33 55 77

The Water Services Regulation Authority – Ofwat

Ofwat is the economic regulator whose role is to agree the prices that can be charged by water companies. Ofwat also scrutinises the services provided to customers to ensure that companies meet the conditions of their licences.

Ofwat's duties include:

- *agreeing the overall increases we can make in our charges*
- *setting controls on the levels of service we must provide*
- *setting requirements about the information we must give our customers*

You can contact Ofwat at:

Centre City Tower, 7 Hill Street, Birmingham, B5 4UA

Email: mailbox@ofwat.gsi.gov.uk

Website: ofwat.gov.uk

Tel: 0300 034 2222

The Consumer Council for Water

The Consumer Council for Water is an organisation independent of the water industry. It:

- *represents the interests of customers of the water and sewerage companies in England and Wales*
- *promotes customers' interests in relation to those companies' prices and standards of service*
- *has legal duties for dealing with customers' complaints against those companies where they have not been able to resolve the matter with the company direct*

You can contact the Consumer Council for Water at:

1st Floor Victoria Square House, Victoria Square, Birmingham, B2 4AJ

Email: enquiries@ccwater.org.uk

Website: ccwater.org.uk

Tel: 0300 034 2222

Drinking Water Inspectorate – DWI

The Drinking Water Inspectorate is the independent organisation that ensures the legal standards for drinking water quality are met, and oversees the quality of tap water, making sure water is safe to drink when it reaches your home.

You can contact the Drinking Water Inspectorate at:

Area 7e, 9 Millbank c/o Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR

Email: dwi.enquiries@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Website: dwi.gov.uk

Tel: 0300 068 6400

Environment Agency

The Environment Agency is responsible for regulating how much water we can abstract from the environment, and protecting and improving the quality of rivers, estuaries and coastal waters. It is also responsible for pollution control, flood defence and fisheries.

You can contact the Environment Agency at:

National Customer Contact Centre,
PO Box 544, Rotherham, S60 1BY

Email: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

Website: environment-agency.gov.uk

Tel: 03708 506 506 Minicom: 03702 422 549

The water services we provide

Our business is to supply treated water to our existing customers and to connect new customers seeking a water supply for household use. In this section we tell you what services we must provide, what we aim to do and what your own responsibilities are.

If we fail to meet certain standards you may be entitled to a payment under our Guaranteed Standards of Service Scheme. Please see our Customer Code of Practice leaflet Guaranteed Standards of Service.

Water quality

The quality of your drinking water is monitored at every stage of the treatment process from the source to your tap.

The taste, colour and hardness or softness of your water depends significantly on the source of the water supply. Two thirds of our water comes from underground aquifers while the remainder comes from rivers and reservoirs.

We take samples every day, which are analysed in our state-of-the-art laboratories to ensure the water is safe to drink and that we are complying with the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 2000 (as amended 2007).

We must supply water that complies with these regulations and where possible we will improve on that standard. We have statutory powers of entry to take samples in relation to these regulations.

The quality of water for domestic purposes is also monitored by the independent Drinking Water Inspectorate. The regulations cover the chemical and bacteriological quality of the water and also its acceptability, which is measured by its colour, clarity, odour and taste. There are prescribed concentrations or values for each of these parameters.

We must sample and test the water at regular intervals and maintain records of those tests for each of our water supply zones. These records are available for inspection by the public. This is free of charge for their own zone or on payment of a fixed charge for any other area. Records may be inspected at our head office where you can make a copy of any part. If you want to know about the water in your supply zone please contact us and we will send you a copy free of charge within seven days of your request. Our contact details are shown on the back of this leaflet.

If you have a concern about the quality of your drinking water, please contact us. If we take a sample of your water following an enquiry we will provide you with details of the water quality standards and the results of our analysis. We aim to be at your premises within four hours of receiving a concern that indicates a threat to public health.

If you believe that your water has become unfit to drink, contact us immediately. **Do not drink the water until you have spoken to us.**

In very rare cases it may be necessary to advise customers to boil water before using it, or not to use it at all for drinking or cooking. We will tell you by whichever method allows us to communicate the information to you as quickly as possible.

If we do advise you to boil your water, we will make an automatic payment to the accounts of all those customers affected.

If we take a water sample from your property we guarantee to tell you the results of the sample within 20 working days. If we take a sample because you think the water is making you or someone in your household ill, we guarantee to tell you the results within 48 hours.

Details of these payments are provided in our Customer Code of Practice leaflet Guaranteed Standards of Service.

Under the water supply regulations we must follow, we visit customers' properties to obtain random samples from their taps so that we can test the quality of the water.

We don't make appointments for these visits, however, you should always ask for proof of identification from anyone visiting your home.

South East Water employees wear distinctive uniforms and drive vans with our company logo on them.

Follow our three-point checklist when a caller claims to be from South East Water.

Be stranger aware:

- *check their company photographic identity card*
- *look for the South East Water logo on their uniform and van*
- *if you are uncertain about anyone claiming to be from South East Water you can call our bogus caller line 0333 000 2244 to double check*

You can find out more about your water quality by reading our information leaflets Water quality, making it crystal clear and Water quality explained, a guide to the limits, which can be found on our website.

Water resources

In normal circumstances we must manage our supplies so we can provide you with enough water for domestic purposes. This includes essential water uses such as drinking, washing, cooking, central heating and sanitation, as well as non-essential uses, such as watering the garden and washing the car.

We are required to plan a long way ahead, and do this by preparing a 25 year Water Resources Management Plan.

By planning so far in advance we can find the most sustainable long-term options to meet the demands of our existing and anticipated new customers. Our planning ensures that we adopt the best options to manage both customer demand for water and the development of the most sustainable sources of supply.

We consult with our customers and stakeholders to produce these plans which are prepared every five years. You can view our current plan on our website corporate.southeastwater.co.uk/wrmp

We work hard to manage water supplies and reduce wastage, for example by finding and fixing leaks and installing new pipelines. We also promote and support our customers to be more water efficient.

We believe metering provides the fairest way to pay for water and recognise the importance of making sure we protect vulnerable customer groups. Water meters help customers to understand their water usage while encouraging them to use water wisely. Find out more about water efficiency on page 11 of this leaflet.

At times of drought or exceptionally high demand, we may have to restrict non-essential water use, such as hosepipes, so that all our customers can continue to receive adequate supplies for essential purposes, such as drinking, washing and cooking. Our Water Resources Management Plan has been prepared so that such restrictions should not be necessary more than once in 10 years. It should remain possible to continue watering your garden during hosepipe bans using watering cans, a water butt or even by recycling bath water.

Temporary hosepipe restrictions are rare but are occasionally necessary to manage very high demand or drought events. To design a water supply system that removed hosepipe restrictions under any circumstances would be environmentally unsustainable and prohibitively expensive.

During more severe droughts we may need to take further action by applying to the Environment Agency for Drought Permits or to the Secretary of State for Drought Orders or Emergency Drought Orders. This helps us restrict water usage further for certain non-domestic and commercial purposes and to obtain extra supplies. If we make any such application we'll advertise this in the local press so any member of the public can raise a query or object to the proposed order or permit.

Water pressure

We must supply water at a pressure that will ensure water reaches the top-most storey of each building, unless the building is at such a height that water will not flow to it by gravity from the storage reservoir it is supplied from.

In practice we aim to do better than this. In most cases you can expect a minimum water pressure of one bar at the stop tap. What this means is that:

- *water will rise and fill a storage tank at the second floor level*
- *the minimum flow at the first cold water tap on the ground floor will be nine litres per minute, equivalent to filling a one gallon bucket in 30 seconds*

Pressure and flow rates in your home can be affected by a number of factors:

- *the height of the property above the water main and its height relevant to our storage reservoir*
- *the length, size and condition of your supply pipe*
- *whether the property shares its supply pipe with other properties*
- *peak demand conditions, such as those experienced in long, dry spells*

If you think that your water pressure is too low or too high, contact us using the details at the back of this leaflet. We will investigate and if the cause is our responsibility, we will take appropriate action. If it is not, we will advise you what you need to do.

We will make an automatic payment to your account if pressure falls below seven metres static head for at least one hour and this happens twice within a 28-day period. The drop in pressure has to be recorded on our logging devices, which we will install to test the pressure.

Details of these payments are provided in our Customer Code of Practice leaflet Guaranteed Standards of Service.

Interruptions to water supplies

We work to provide a constant supply of water but occasionally, sudden events such as burst mains can interrupt the flow. If you have no water coming from your mains tap, usually in the kitchen, contact us immediately using the numbers on the back of this leaflet.

If your water supply stops, we will restore your supply as soon as possible. Our target is to do this in less than 12 hours, but our larger mains pipes are more difficult to repair and may take longer. If the interruption lasts longer than 24 hours we will provide you with an alternative supply. This is normally bottled water or emergency water tanks located nearby.

If we are conducting planned works that will interrupt your water supply for longer than four hours, we will advise you in writing at least 48 hours before the start of the interruption. If we fail to do so, we will make an automatic payment to your water account.

As part of our programme for checking leaks we sometimes turn off sections of water mains at night to identify areas that may be leaking. We usually do this between midnight and 6am. The interruptions usually last less than an hour and the disruption is slight, so we won't tell you in advance. If this may cause you a specific problem please contact us.

If we have to interrupt or cut off your supply because of a drought, we'll make an automatic payment to your billing account for each day, or part day, that we've interrupted your supply.

Details of these payments are provided in our Customer Code of Practice leaflet Guaranteed Standards of Service.

Water efficiency

As part of our Water Resources Management Plan, we are committed to implementing many initiatives to conserve water and encourage and help our customers to do the same. In fact, we have a legal responsibility to promote water efficiency to our customers.

Visit our website **southeastwater.co.uk/savewater** for more information about how to use water wisely or complete our water calculator to see how much water you use at home.

Our information leaflet Help the environment also gives lots of simple tips on how to save water, such as turning the tap off when you brush your teeth or taking a shower instead of a bath. This is also available from our website.

New connections

We will connect all new premises to the mains if you ask us to do so. Please contact us using the details on the back of this leaflet for help. On development sites, connections can be carried out by an approved contractor working to the

Self-lay Manual, if authorised in advance. Information on self-lay is available from our website **wholesale.southeastwater.co.uk/self-lay**

You will be required to meet our costs for this service, which will include:

- *the cost of making the connection to our mains pipe*
- *the cost of laying our part of the pipe, called the communication pipe, and installing a stop tap and water meter. See page 14 for an example of pipework layout*

Where a connection is made by an approved contractor working to the self-lay Water Research Centre Code of Practice, you will still be required to pay South East Water for any administration and supervision costs incurred.

All new connections, whether connected by South East Water or an approved contractor, must also pay an infrastructure charge, which is a fixed contribution to our overall costs of making water supplies available.

The first thing you must do is write to us with your requirements. We will inspect the site and send you a quotation, telling you what you will need to do before we can make a connection. This will normally include:

- *laying your part of the supply pipe to comply with necessary regulations and requirements*
- *paying our costs*
- *providing a separate supply pipe to each part of the premises that is separately occupied*
- *satisfaction inspection by our staff ensuring that the necessary regulations are complied with*
- *obtaining any necessary consents from other landowners or authorities*

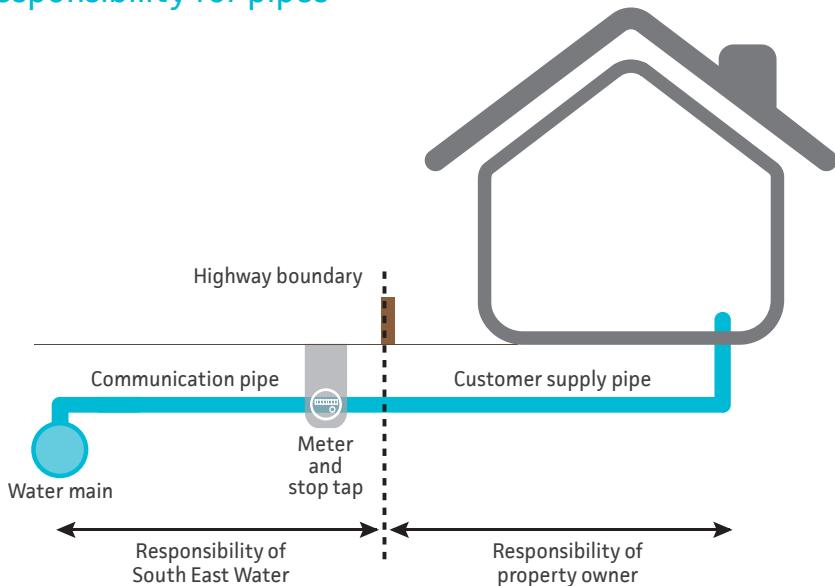
Once the above conditions are satisfied, we must connect the supply pipe to the mains within 14 days (or 21 days if we have to lay our communication pipe). If we do not meet these deadlines and the delay is not caused by a third party, such as the Highways department, you may have a legal claim against us if you have suffered loss or damage as a result.

If there is a disagreement between us about any of the costs or conditions the dispute can be referred to Ofwat (see page 4 for contact details).

If you ask for a new water main to serve several properties we will provide it, where practical. You and any other applicants must pay any difference between the income we receive from charges for water supplied from the main and our reasonable costs in providing the main. You may have to pay these amounts for 12 years. We will also request some security from you before doing the work. We must lay the main within three months of you agreeing that we do so. If we fail to meet the deadline and you sustain loss or damage as a result, you may have a legal claim against us if the delay wasn't caused by a third party.

If we cannot agree the amount you must pay, or the amount of security you should give, either party can refer the matter to Ofwat for a decision.

Responsibility for pipes



Our pipes

The water mains and pipes in the roads and footpaths (the highway) are normally ours. Most properties have an underground stop tap near the boundary within the highway and some have water meters installed. The stop tap and meter are also ours, and we are responsible for keeping all these in good order. More information on water meters is provided in our Code of Practice leaflet Water metering: A guide for household customers.

We have rights of access to lay or maintain pipes on private land, more information on these rights can be found in our Code of Practice leaflet Exercise of pipelaying powers on private land.

Water mains maps are available for inspection free of charge at South East Water's head office at the address on the back of this leaflet.

Your pipes

The pipe taking water from our stop tap or meter into your house is called the supply pipe and is normally yours. It is your responsibility (or your landlord's) to maintain your pipe in good order, in the same way you maintain your internal plumbing in your house, even if it runs under other properties before reaching your house.

Leaks

If there is a leak on your supply pipe, it is your responsibility to repair it. We offer an assisted supply pipe repair scheme, and details of the scheme and other support is provided in our Customer Code of Practice leaflet Leaks from customers' supply pipes. Contact us to discuss the scheme or to request a copy of the leaflet.

In the event of a leak within your property, you may find that you are covered by your household insurance policy. We recommend that you contact your own plumber to carry out the repairs.

If we identify a leak at your property, we will tell you in writing by sending you a Waste of Water Notice. If the leak is not repaired, we may, in an emergency or where the leak is causing damage, turn off the supply until the leak is repaired.

If you have a meter, it will register any wasted water and you will be charged for this. Our Customer Code of Practice leaflet Leaks from customers' supply pipes provides some safeguards for customers, principally:

- when the meter is installed we will check whether there are any leaks and if these can be repaired without additional excavation, we will repair the leak free of charge*
- if there is a leak that is not detected until later we will make an adjustment to the charges provided the leak is repaired and was not caused by your negligence, or where you knew or should have known that there was a leak and failed to repair it*

Where adjustments are made to water supply charges, a similar adjustment may also be made for the wastewater charges. We will advise Southern Water or Thames Water if this applies.

If you spot a water leak anywhere within our supply area please contact us on our 24-hour Leakline service **0333 000 3330** or southeastwater.co.uk/reportaleak

Lead pipes

Since the 1970s, the use of lead as a material for water pipes has been phased out and lead solder has also been banned for use with copper drinking water installations.

Lead can build up in the body and it can be harmful. It is sensible to avoid excessive exposure from any source and it is therefore important to keep lead levels in water as low as possible.

If you have lead pipes and you decide to replace these, we will also replace our part of the pipe that connects your pipe to our main (known as the communication pipe) free of charge if this is also lead.

If you share a lead supply pipe with neighbours who agree to have it replaced, we require separate pipes to be laid from each property and will charge for the new communication pipes from our main.

Please contact your local authority before you start work as they may be able to provide a grant to help you replace lead pipes.

Badly rusted supply pipes

Old iron pipes can become badly rusted inside. The rust restricts the flow through the pipes and may discolour the water. If this is the case and you replace your supply pipe with modern materials, we will also renew our communication pipe if necessary once your work has been completed.

Preventing burst pipes

Insulating pipes against spells of cold weather can help prevent burst pipes, which can cause significant damage if water leaks through ceilings, buildings and over furniture. More information can be found on our website southeastwater.co.uk/winter

A few simple precautions can help prevent the damage caused by burst pipes in the home.

- *lag outside pipes with insulating material*
- *ensure pipes, cisterns and tanks in unheated areas such as lofts are lagged*
- *repair dripping taps*
- *if away leave the heating on low or drain down the system*
- *check loft insulation is in good condition*
- *leave loft doors open to allow warm air to circulate*
- *check your internal stop tap will turn off in an emergency*
- *if a pipe bursts turn off the water and central heating*
- *keep the number of a reliable plumber to hand*
- *make sure you have adequate insurance*

Shared supply pipes

You may share a supply pipe with one or more of your neighbours and the flow of water at your tap may be unacceptably low when your neighbours are using water.

If the pipe is in a poor condition and leaking, we will normally require you and your neighbours to share the cost of replacing it, and to lay separate supply pipes to each property.

This should improve both the flow and the quality of water at your tap as well as ensuring water is not wasted.

We will also normally require separate supply pipes to replace a shared pipe if:

- *the houses are converted into a larger number of flats or homes*
- *the shared pipe has been interfered with*
- *one of the households on the shared pipe falls into payment arrears*

If there is a disagreement between us about any of the above, the dispute can be referred to Ofwat (see page 4 for contact details).

If you are unsure whether your supply pipe is shared, please contact us using the details at the back of this leaflet.

Electrical earthing

Some properties, if built before 1966 and not subsequently rewired, may find the water supply pipe is still used as a primary method of earthing. This has not been viewed as a safe method for over 40 years and in such cases it is recommended that you contact your electricity provider or competent electrician to have the electrical installation checked for safety.

Any electrical earthing issues that the property may have will be pre-existing and are not caused by the water meter installation. Therefore South East Water cannot be liable for any electrical earthing issues that may arise.

Protection of water supplies against contamination

Water supplies are protected against contamination, waste and misuse of water by the Water Supply (Water Fitting) Regulations 1999.

The regulations are designed to safeguard water supplies by preventing backflow, back-siphonage and interconnections of water from other sources. The regulations should be referred to when carrying out plumbing works and copies are available, at a charge, from the Water Regulation Advisory Scheme. Details can be found at wras.co.uk, or by calling 0333 207 9030.

The regulations require visible warning pipes on feed-cisterns and that fittings do not encourage leaks. Domestic systems must comply with the regulations to ensure that the misuse of water is minimised.

Water supply companies are legally responsible for the enforcement of the regulations and where necessary can exercise their statutory rights of entry in order to undertake inspections of new and existing installations to check that the regulations are being met.

You can find out more about how these regulations may affect you in our information leaflet The Water Supply Regulations – what are they, and how do they affect you? which is available to download from our website **southeastwater.co.uk/waterregs**

For more information about South East Water

Please refer to our website **southeastwater.co.uk** or the other Customer Code of Practice leaflets:

Exercise of pipelaying powers on private land

Household water charges, payment options and debt recovery

If things go wrong

Leaks from customers' supply pipes

Our Guaranteed Standards of Service

Priority Services Register: Our services for customers with additional needs

Water metering: A guide for household customers

The information we provide is intended to be accessible to all our customers.

If you would prefer this leaflet in an alternative format, such as large print, braille or audio, please contact us.

Additionally if your first language is not English we may be able to help you with our interpretation service when you call.

Contact details are on the back of this leaflet.

Customer Care

South East Water offers a wide range of tariffs, payment schemes and support to customers with additional needs or difficulty paying their bill.

For more information contact our specialist team on **0333 000 2468** or visit **southeastwater.co.uk/customercare**

How to contact us

Our Customer Service Centre is open:
Monday to Friday from 8am to 7pm
Saturday from 8am to 1pm
We are closed on Sundays and Bank Holidays



southeastwater.co.uk



southeastwater.co.uk/contact



Facebook and Twitter: @sewateruk



Water supply and general enquiries
0333 000 0002

Out of hours emergencies

0333 00 00 365

24 hour automated payment line

0333 00 00 247

24 hour leakline

0333 000 3330



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