

CODE OF PRACTICE

# Dealing with Leaks



## **We are committed to giving you, our customer, the best possible service - all day, every day.**

With a network of over 26,700 kilometres of water mains serving approximately 818,000 homes and businesses across Northern Ireland, we all have an interest in using water efficiently and reducing leaks. We want everyone to take leaking pipes seriously and in this leaflet we explain:

- Who is responsible for pipes
- How to check for a leak
- How we manage leaks
- How we adjust bills affected by a leak.

Certain parts of this Code of Practice only apply to non-domestic customers who have a water meter and pay measured charges.

## **Learn about the services we provide**


Essential information about the services we provide can be found in our Codes of Practice. These have been approved by the Utility Regulator and include the following:

- Water Supply services
- Sewerage Services
- Dealing with Leaks
- Complaints Procedure
- Metering and Billing for Non-Domestic Customers.

## **All of our information leaflets and letters can be requested in the following formats:**

- In Braille
- In large print
- On CD and audio tape.

All information leaflets can be downloaded from our website.



**If you spot a leak,  
please call us free  
on Leakline  
08000 282011**

## Our pipes and how we manage leakage

Some people may think that because we have high levels of rainfall in Northern Ireland we should have a plentiful supply of water. The reality is that there is a limit on the amount of water that can be stored and treated to make it safe to use. The efficient use of water and the timely repair of leaks is of great importance to help ensure that water supplies are available when needed. From an environmental and economic perspective, any waste of treated water also wastes the energy and other natural resources that are used to treat and distribute the water to you.

We are responsible for repairing leaks on our water pipes. This includes the water mains and that portion of the supply pipe between the water main and property boundary. This is shown in the diagram on page 5 of this leaflet.

At Northern Ireland Water we are working hard to reduce, to an economic level, the amount of water lost through leaks from our pipes. The economic level is the balance between the cost of reducing leakage and the cost of the water saved.

### What we do

- We manage the supply of water by dividing the network into controlled areas.
- We use meters and sensors to carefully monitor the flows through our network of mains water pipes. An alarm will alert us when the flows exceed normal operating range. This helps to identify areas of suspected leakage.
- We regularly check and repair all our mains water pipes. Our Leakage Technicians listen to parts of the pipework and can hear if water is leaking from the system. This helps to locate the leak.
- We report our leakage reduction performance annually to the Utility Regulator.
- We manage water pressure to minimise leakage while ensuring that it is sufficient to meet requirements.
- We consider the condition of a water main, in terms of leakage levels, when deciding to replace a water main.
- If you are a non-domestic customer and we find that a meter reading shows an unusual and significant increase we will alert you to this, usually by writing to you. This may indicate leakage on your supply and it is your responsibility to check for and repair any leaks.



## How you can help us

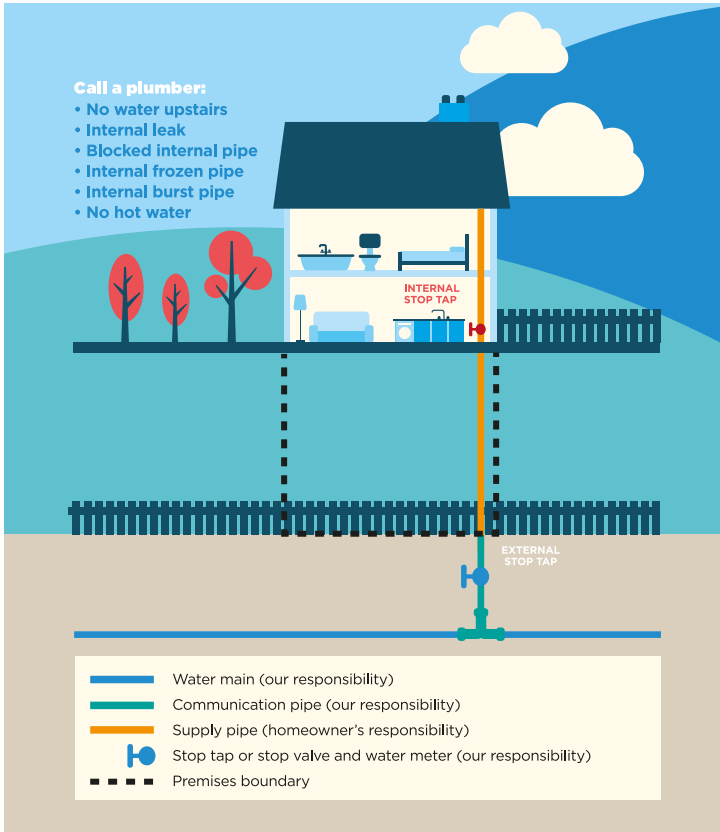
We actively carry out leak detection work but our network of pipes is vast. If you see a water leak on a road or footpath don't ignore it, please telephone us on **Leakline 08000 282011**, lines are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and calls are free. Alternatively, you can notify us by selecting the 'report a leak' option and completing the short online form on our website.

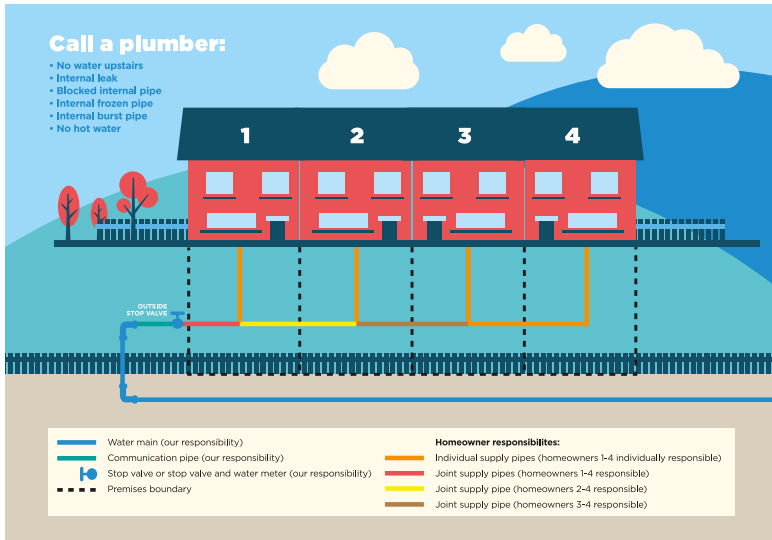
**[www.niwater.com/report-a-leak-or-burst-pipe](http://www.niwater.com/report-a-leak-or-burst-pipe)**

We are very grateful when customers alert us to a leak in their area. We will investigate and carry out any necessary repairs.

## Your pipes and responsibilities

It is very important for you to be aware that you have responsibilities to maintain the supply pipe which delivers water to your property. The diagram below shows who is responsible for which pipes.





The diagram above provides an overview of the various pipes involved and whether it is NI Water's or the customer's responsibility.

### What we are responsible for

We are usually responsible for looking after the water main and the pipe that runs from the water main to the boundary of the street, including the stopcock or meter (which we also own). This portion of the service pipe is known as the 'communication pipe'. We are responsible for repairing any leaks on the communication pipe, stopcock or meter.

## What you are responsible for

You are usually responsible for any pipe or pipes between the boundary of the street in which the water main is laid (or from the water main if it is not laid in the street) and your property. This is called the 'supply pipe'. You will be responsible for any leak on the supply pipe, including pipework under and inside your property.

In some cases, the supply pipe may have been laid in private ground owned by somebody else. You are responsible for the supply pipe and you should ensure that you have permission to enter the property to maintain the pipe. This may require a formal agreement between yourself and the other property owner(s).

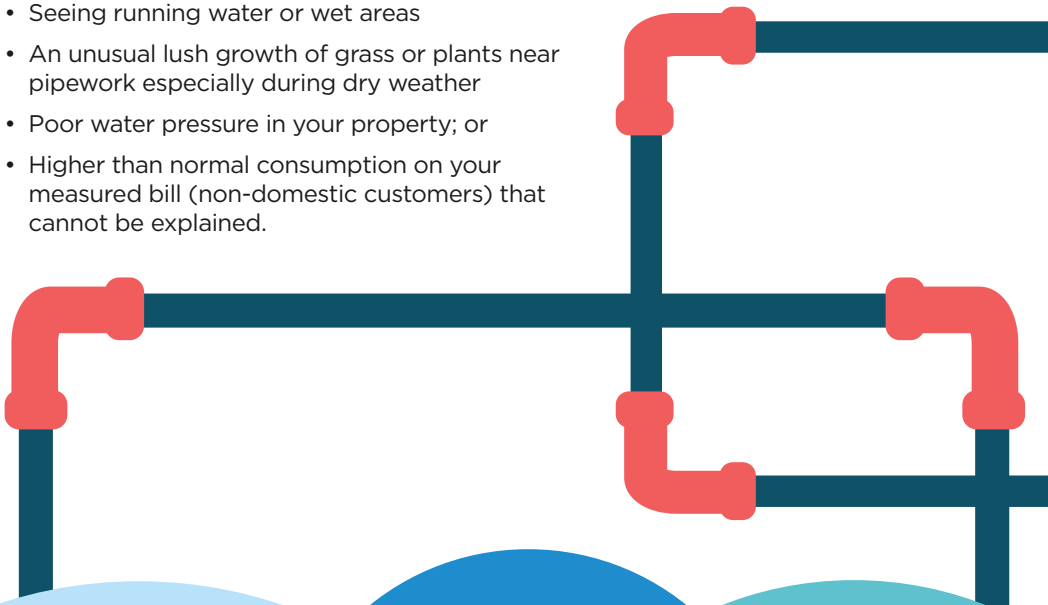
Sometimes more than one property may be connected through a common supply pipe. Where this is the case, a leak may affect the flow and pressure of the water supply to some or all properties sharing the common supply pipe. Responsibility for such common supply pipes, including the costs for any repairs, is a private matter between the property owners who share the supply pipe. This may mean that although only one customer has noticed a problem, a number of neighbours are affected and have to share any costs.

## Is there a leak on your pipe?

Water leaks are a waste of a precious resource and, if left to run, may cause damage to your property. The cost of putting right long-term damage is always far greater than dealing with a leak promptly so it is in everyone's interest to prevent and repair leaks. A number of signs may show there is a leak on your supply pipe.

These include:

- Hearing running water
- Seeing running water or wet areas
- An unusual lush growth of grass or plants near pipework especially during dry weather
- Poor water pressure in your property; or
- Higher than normal consumption on your measured bill (non-domestic customers) that cannot be explained.



If there is a leak on your supply pipe, it is your responsibility to find the leak and repair it. You may need to employ the services of a leak detection specialist or a plumber to help you find the leak and have it repaired. In the interests of consumer protection we recommend that you always use competent tradespeople who are members of a relevant accreditation scheme. The following websites may be helpful: **[www.needaplumber.org](http://www.needaplumber.org)** or **[www.watersafe.org.uk](http://www.watersafe.org.uk)**

Some older supply pipes may be in poor condition and therefore it may be more sensible to replace the supply pipe rather than simply repairing the leak itself as it is quite likely that further leaks will occur.

We have a legal right to insist that you repair any leaks on your supply pipe. We hope you don't ever have a leak but if we suspect that there is a leak on your pipe we will do the following:

- Ask you to repair the leak.
- In addition we are likely to serve a legal notice that orders you to repair the leak.
- The legal notice usually allows you 28 days to repair the leak.
- If we have served a legal notice and you have not completed the repair within the period of the notice, we will carry out the repair and charge you for all of the costs.
- In extreme cases (if the escaping water is hazardous or causing harm to people or property) we can disconnect the water supply until you carry out the repair.

## **Non-Domestic Customers - Leakage and your metered bill**

### **Checking for leaks before we install a meter**

When we install a meter on an existing supply, we will check to see if there is any leakage from your private supply pipe. We will repair any leak free of charge provided we can do so without any further digging. If additional digging is required you will be responsible for finding and repairing the leak yourself.

Normally we will not start to record your water consumption through the meter until the leak has been repaired.



## Finding a leak on your supply

We recommend you keep a check on the amount of water you are using by taking regular meter readings, particularly if you have a long supply pipe, or following periods of exceptional or prolonged cold weather. If your recorded consumption suddenly increases this may indicate a leak on your pipework.

We recommend that you carry out the following checks:

### 1. For Underground Pipes

- Locate meter.
- Close internal stop tap.
- If meter is still recording a flow, investigate further and
- Look for patches of unusually damp ground.

### 2. For Internal Plumbing

- During a period of no water use, check meter.
- If meter is recording a flow, close internal stop tap.
- If meter stops recording a flow, check internal pipework and appliances.

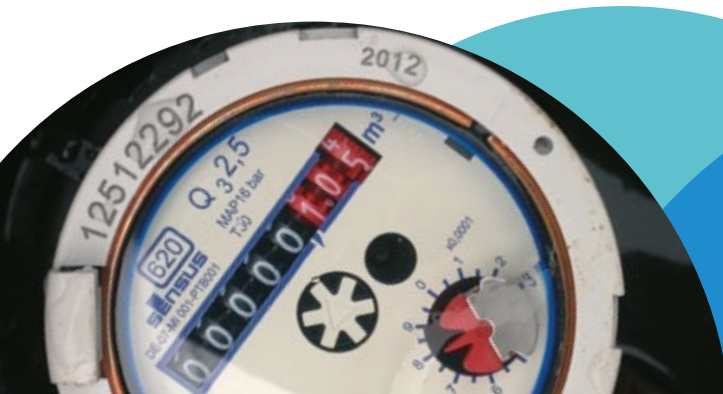
For guidance on how to read a water meter see our Code of Practice on Billing and Metering for Non Domestic Customers or visit our website:

**[www.niwater.com/read-your-meter](http://www.niwater.com/read-your-meter)**

## Liability for leakage costs on water

Where a leak occurs between the meter and point of use, water will be recorded as consumption on the meter and may result in a high bill. All water supplied through a meter for non-domestic purposes, whether consumed or lost through leakage, will be billed. This includes where there is a short period of unusually high consumption which then reduces. Often this can be due to a previous estimated read which was too low.

Unless a test shows that the meter is not recording properly (see our Code of Practice on Metering and Billing for Non Domestic Customers) this will be used as the basis for your bill.





## Liability for leakage costs on sewerage

The sewerage charges on a bill are directly linked to the volume of water recorded, this assumes that 95% of water supplied is returned as sewerage, unless we have agreed a different Non-Return to Sewer allowance.

If there has been a leak you can apply to have the sewerage charges on your bill adjusted to take account of the water which leaked and did not reach the sewer. This can be requested each time a leak occurs, provided it can be demonstrated that any previous leaks were properly repaired.

The sewerage charges on the bill will be averaged for the period of the leak, based on your previous normal consumption records. This is subject to the following conditions:-

- The leak occurred on underground, or hidden internal pipework within your property boundary
- The leak has been fixed within 4 weeks of the date it was found
- There is no evidence that the leak has been caused by your negligence or wilful damage
- A claim is made within 6 weeks of the date the leak was fixed, or the date the bill issues, whichever is later; and
- Any allowance granted will relate to the period from the date of the last bill (based on an actual read) until the date of its repair.

It is your responsibility to fix any leak on your pipework as soon as you find it. If you do not own your property, your landlord may be responsible for fixing the leak, but the bill payer will still be liable, even if the leak is on a shared supply pipe within the property. If necessary you should ask your landlord, or the property owner to carry out the repair.

If the leak occurs on a portion of the pipe that Northern Ireland Water has responsibility for (e.g. between the meter and your property boundary), both the water and sewerage elements of the bill will be averaged. Additionally, if such a leak occurs as a result of damage caused by us or our contractors you will not be financially liable and we will repair any damage caused.

## Leakage on the domestic part of a mixed use supply

If you have a single metered supply providing water to a non-domestic and domestic mixed use property, and a leak occurs on the domestic part of the supply you can apply to have both the water and sewerage elements of your bill adjusted. The same conditions apply as above, and you will have to show that the leak was repaired. We may visit your property for you to show us where the leak had been and confirm that this was on the domestic portion. If leaks happen again we may require you to separate the supplies.

## Our Promises

- We will check for leaks on your supply when we fit a meter and if we find a leak, will fix it free of charge if we can access it without further digging.
- We will provide advice on how to find leakage on your supply.
- If you are metered and billed and you have had a leak on your supply you can apply to have the sewerage part of your bill adjusted.
- When we read your meter and your consumption shows an unusual and significant increase we will alert you to this, usually in writing.

### **Here are some easy ways you can save water:**

- Fit a trigger gun to your hosepipe to control the flow. If you don't, you can use as much water in one hour as a family uses in a whole day
- Collect rainwater in a water butt, then use it to water your garden or wash your car
- Fix dripping taps as soon as possible and encourage users not to leave taps running
- For most businesses, toilet and urinal flushing typically make up 63% of water use, so improvements in the efficiency of plumbing devices will significantly reduce the amount of water consumed
- Have a short shower instead of a bath, as this will use much less water (unless you have a power shower)
- Insulate your pipes to protect them from frost and prevent them from bursting
- Turn off the supply to properties or appliances that are not in use regularly; and
- Only use a washing machine or dishwasher with a full load. If you are looking for a new appliance, choose one that is water efficient as well as energy efficient.

## How do you make a complaint?

If you believe that we have not complied with this code of practice, please let us know using the following contact details:



**Phone: Waterline 03457 440088**



**Text Relay Service: 03457 440088**



**Northern Ireland Water**

PO Box 1026

Belfast

BT1 9DJ



**Email: [waterline@niwater.com](mailto:waterline@niwater.com)**



**Website: [www.niwater.com](http://www.niwater.com)**

If you wish to make a complaint, our Code of Practice on Complaints explains how we will deal with your concern.



## Independent Help and Advice

### The Consumer Council

If you remain unhappy with how we initially dealt with your complaint or would like free, independent advice, you can contact the Consumer Council. The Consumer Council has the power to act on your behalf and investigate your complaint about our services; they can provide assistance if you need help when making a complaint.



#### **Consumer Council**

Floor 3, Seatem House  
28-32 Alfred Street  
Belfast, BT2 8EN



**Phone: 0800 121 6022**



**Textphone: 028 9025 1600**



**Fax: 028 9025 1663**



**Email: [contact@consumercouncil.org.uk](mailto:contact@consumercouncil.org.uk)**



**Website: [www.consumercouncil.org.uk](http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk)**



## The Utility Regulator

If your complaint is about our standards of service, non-compliance with our licence conditions or statutory obligations and we haven't resolved it you may wish to contact the Utility Regulator. This is the independent non-ministerial government department responsible for regulating Northern Ireland Water.



### **The Utility Regulator**

Queens House  
14 Queen Street  
Belfast BT1 6ED



**Phone: 028 9031 1575**



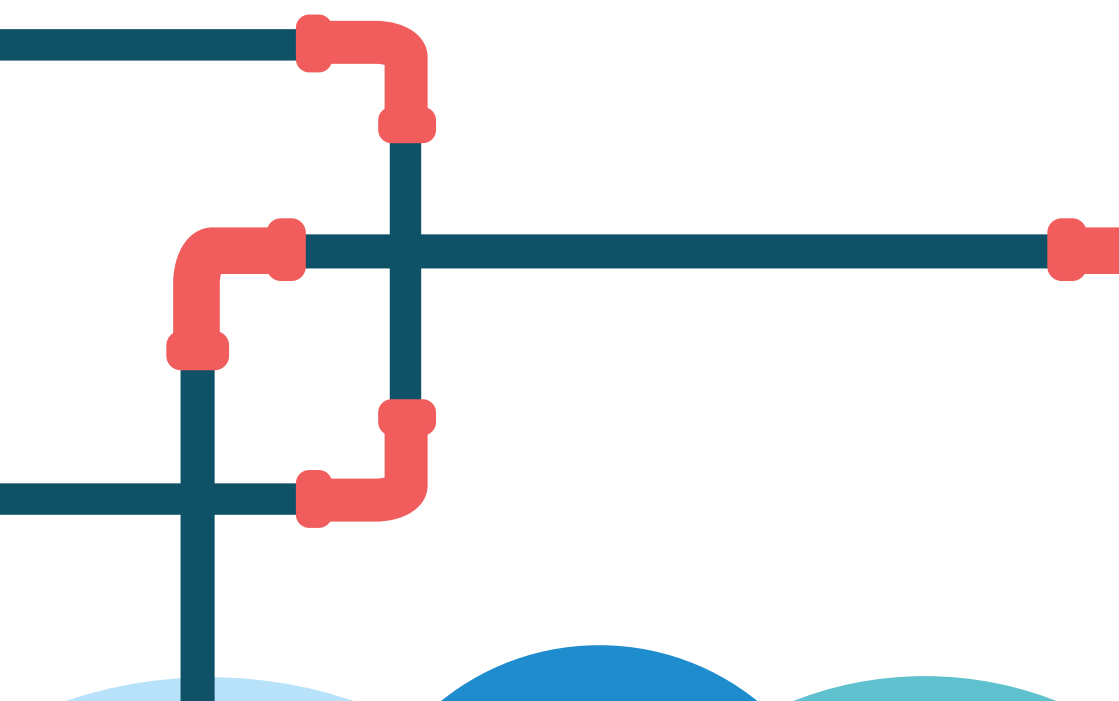
**Fax: 028 9031 1740**



**Email: [info@uregni.gov.uk](mailto:info@uregni.gov.uk)**



**Website: [www.uregni.gov.uk](http://www.uregni.gov.uk)**





**Northern Ireland Water**

PO Box 1026  
Belfast  
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**Leakline: 08000 282011**



**Waterline: 03457 440088**



**Text Relay Service: 03457 440088**



**Email: [waterline@niwater.com](mailto:waterline@niwater.com)**



**Website: [www.niwater.com](http://www.niwater.com)**

northern ireland  
**water**



**Delivering what matters**