

Water Guide

for Small Businesses and
Not-For-Profit Organisations



The Consumer Council Water Information Guide
for small businesses and not-for-profit organisations

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1. Introduction

The Consumer Council represents consumers on water and sewerage matters in Northern Ireland. We do this by working with the Government, NI Water and the economic and environmental regulators to make sure that consumers are at the centre of decisions and policies.

Our core aim in promoting and safeguarding the interests of consumers is to ensure that water and sewerage services are fair, affordable and sustainable.

We help business customers by providing the following free services:

- Water Bill Health Checks (section 3)
- Water Efficiency Advice (section 3)
- Water Efficiency Recognition Award (section 4)
- Assistance to pursue complaints (section 5)
- Presentations and workshops (section 6)

NI Water provides consumers with water and sewerage services throughout Northern Ireland. If you have any problems with your water or sewerage services you should first contact NI Water to seek a solution.

If you have access to the internet NI Water's website gives comprehensive information on what the company can do to help you, including a map showing real time repairs and service interruptions.

2. Water and Sewerage Charges

Billing for Non-Domestic Customers

NI Water bills its non-domestic customers in different ways depending on whether there is a water meter fitted or not. NI Water provides an explanation of these billing methods on its website, <https://www.niwater.com/understanding-your-bill/>

We have provided our own summary of these methods below. If there is anything you don't understand about your bill then get in touch and request our free Water Bill Health Check.

If you need to contact NI Water about your bill you can phone 0345 877 0030 or email customer.billing@niwater.com

Measured Bills – When you have a water meter

The customer reference number on these bills starts with MC. It is helpful to have this number to hand if you phone NI Water. This billing method means that you pay a standing charge for your water service, similar to phone line rental, and then an additional amount for the water that you use. This is called a volume rate, this volume is measured by your water meter. If your waste water goes into the public sewer system then you also pay a sewerage standing charge and volume rate.

Most customers receive two measured bills per year. If your bill straddles 1 April then your bill will have two sets of all these charges, this is because the annual Scheme of Charges is released that day. The charges are split proportionally up to 31 March and from 1 April.

There are rules relating to VAT and allowances on a measured bill. Many customers are not claiming the allowances they are entitled to, including the domestic allowance for businesses that pay rates. We can help you claim these allowances. To find out how, request our free Water Bill Health Check.

Unmeasured Bills – When you don't have a water meter

The customer reference number on these bills starts with UC. It is helpful to have this number to hand if you phone NI Water. This billing method can either be fully unmeasured or based on an estimate of how much water you would use.

A fully unmeasured bill is based on the rateable Net Annual Valuation (NAV) of your property. Therefore the larger your NAV, the larger your bill, irrespective of how much water you use. Unmeasured bills do have an upper limit charge cap. This cap is reviewed every year. Customers receive one bill a year, usually in April.

The alternative method of billing a customer without a meter is called Assessed Charges. With assessed charges you pay a standing charge, similar to a measured customer, and additionally you pay a variable charge based on an assessment of how much water your property would use. NI Water will only consider an application for assessed charges billing after it has surveyed your property to see if a meter can be fitted. You need to contact NI Water and ask for this to be done.

The Consumer Council's free Water Bill Health Check will help you understand your bill in greater detail and recommend the best billing method based on your personal circumstances.

Trade Effluent Bills

Some customers receive an additional sewerage bill, known as a trade effluent bill. This type of billing occurs when it is not normal waste water that is being discharged to the public sewer. Sometimes trade effluent charges are actually cheaper than normal sewerage charges.

Shared Supply Bills

If you are located in a building or an enclosed site that has more than one business, or a mix of business premises and

domestic homes, there may be cost effective methods of billing that are outside the responsibility of NI Water.

Additional allowances may also be available if other homes or businesses are sharing your metered water supply. You can get further information about this by requesting The Consumer Council's free Water Bill Health Check.

Charging Domestic Properties

Some domestic properties are billed for water services due to their classification with Land and Property Services or because they have non-domestic infrastructure on their land. An example of this would be a farm house with a field and a connected drinking trough.

Billed customers can get an allowance against their water and sewerage charges if they have domestic properties on their supply.

If you are being billed by NI Water, have explained your circumstances and still require additional information, you can contact us for free independent advice.



3. Water Bill Health Check and Water Efficiency

Savings of up to 50% on water use can be achieved by installing or investing in no cost or low cost water reduction practices and technologies.

The Consumer Council provides a free Water Bill Health Check service to businesses. This service will give you a simple breakdown and explanation of your water bill. It will ensure that you are being billed correctly and will help identify opportunities for you to save money on your water bills. If appropriate for your circumstance, we will also provide some water efficiency advice.

For your free Water Bill Health Check please send an email request to info@consumercouncil.org.uk or call 0800 121 6022.

Some recent examples of savings made through this service include:

- A licensed premises reduced its water bill by £1,200 a year by making a simple water efficiency change.
- A solicitor's office had its annual water bill reduced from £885 to £152 by changing the way it is billed.
- A fast food outlet had its water bill reduced by more than £500 a year and got a rebate of £3,000 by claiming an allowance they were unaware of.

We have also worked with NI Water and Invest NI to produce A Practical Water Efficiency Guide for Businesses in Northern Ireland. This can be downloaded at <https://www.investni.com/sites/default/files/documents/static/library/invest-ni/documents/water-efficiency-guide-a-practical-guide.pdf>

Some simple steps that you can take to help your business become water efficient include:

- **Monitor your usage:** If you are a metered customer, keep a regular log of the water going through your meter. This will help you to keep an eye on your usage and help notice any leaks.
- **Overnight meter readings:** Take a meter reading when your business is closed to help identify wasted water use.
- **Regularly check your pipes and fittings:** Check for leaks and ensure your pipes are well insulated against frost. Remember that any leakage from private pipes will be billed to you or your business.
- **Educate staff:** Speak to staff about implementing water efficiency measures. Consider appointing a member of staff to monitor water usage.
- **Know where your supply pipes and shut off valves are:** Shut off water to unused areas of your premises to stop waste from leaks or unmonitored usage.

4. Water Champions

We recognise businesses, farms and schools that have improved their water efficiency and continue to effectively manage their water use.

Who can take part?

Public and private organisations, farms, the self-employed and schools are welcome to apply. Entry is easy and it is free.

How can my business be recognised as a Water Champion?

Review your business's water use and look at ways you can save water. Make sure your bills are correct by requesting our free Water Bill Health Check. Once you contact us we will help you complete the application form, and once approved you will be presented with a framed Certificate of Achievement and a Water Champion logo to use on your online platforms.

How do I apply?

You can apply by filling in the application form on our website or emailing waterchampions@consumercouncil.org.uk to request a copy.

If you need help filling in the form or have any other questions about Water Champions you can contact us on our dedicated email waterchampions@consumercouncil.org.uk or by Freephone 0800 121 6022.

How will becoming a Water Champion benefit me or my business?

Some of our previous Water Champions have gone on to win local and national water efficiency and environmental awards. Some have used the Water Champions recognition within their ISO compliance and won large national tenders and contracts.

We will work with you to promote your achievements through social media or your local press.

My business is not metered. Can I still apply?

Yes, by becoming more water efficient you are still making a contribution to the environment and although you cannot measure the savings through a meter, we can still evaluate the efforts you have made.

5. How to Complain

If you have a complaint about your water or sewerage services, follow these simple steps:

1. Contact NI Water first. Your complaint should be acknowledged or responded to within 10 working days.
2. If you do not receive a response, or the issue is not resolved satisfactorily, you should contact The Consumer Council. We have a complaints team that will investigate your complaint free of charge and keep you informed of any developments. Simply contact us on 0800 121 6022 or email contact@consumercouncil.org.uk and we can investigate your complaint on your behalf.

You can contact The Consumer Council at any time for information and advice about any water or sewerage issue or other consumer issues in general.

6. Other Ways The Consumer Council Can Help Your Business

We can help your business, or individual employees, with specific complaints related to electricity, gas, coal, oil, planes, trains, ferries, buses, post, parcel services and of course water and sewerage.

We can provide advice on:

Consumer Law – To help you understand consumer protection legislation and train your staff in consumer law and customer care.

Energy – To help you understand business tariffs and provide a free switch and save service.

Postal Services – To help you get the right service and save money, and to help you understand the legal obligations for online retailers.

Employee Workplace Workshops

These workshops, which can be run over a lunchtime or tailored to suit staff wellbeing sessions, provide a fun and informative way for employees to learn about:

- Consumer rights
- Passenger rights
- Getting the best deal and
- Saving on household bills

NI Water Contact Details

You can contact NI Water in a number of ways:

Website – www.niwater.com

Waterline (Enquiries and complaints) – 03457 440088*
or email waterline@niwater.com

Billing Queries – 0345 8770030 or
email customer.billing@niwater.com

Text Relay – Through Waterline 03457 440088

By Post – Northern Ireland Water
PO Box 1026
Belfast
BT1 9DJ

Emergencies

Leakline – 0800 028 2011*

Floodline – 0300 2000 100*

Telephone numbers marked * operate 24 hours a day,
7 days a week.



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

Complaints line:

0800 121 6022

Tele/Textphone:

028 9025 1600

Fax:

028 9025 1663

Email:

contact@consumercouncil.org.uk

Web:

www.consumercouncil.org.uk

