

CODE OF PRACTICE

northern ireland  
water



Delivering what matters

# Sewerage Services



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**We're committed to giving you the service you expect, all day, every day. We work hard to make sure you always receive a high-quality service, and we monitor our performance very carefully.**

**We aim to:**

- provide a safe, reliable and efficient service for collecting, treating and getting rid of wastewater
- deal with any problems with the public sewerage system as soon as possible.

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

- Braille
- large print
- CD and audio tape.

**The information leaflets can all be downloaded from [niwater.com](http://niwater.com)**

# Our Promises: at a glance

## Dealing with flooding from public sewers

- We'll be there within 4 hours of receiving your call, or sooner where possible, if your home is flooded internally with wastewater from one of our sewers and you let us know.
- We'll unblock public sewers as quickly as possible. If you call us, we'll respond and unblock the sewer within 8 hours. We'll provide you with a leaflet that gives you advice on how to deal with flooding.
- After a sewer floods, we'll help you clean up. We'll do a litter pick, wash down hard surfaces, and disinfect the area. This is the practice recommended by the Water Research Council. This clean-up will normally take place when we attend to the sewer flooding but there will be occasions when this will be postponed with your agreement.

## New connections to public sewers

- We'll give you our decision within 21 calendar days of the date we receive your application and all relevant

details (subject to an assessment of the capacity at the local wastewater infrastructure).

## If we approve your application:

- We'll tell you all the necessary costs and when these need to be paid.
- We'll explain all of the conditions you have to meet.

## What if there's no sewer to connect to?

- We'll tell you our decision within two months of the date we receive your application.
- If we agree to make a new sewer available for you to use, we must provide it within six months of the day you pay the charges or the day we agree the connection details, whichever is later. Some major schemes need longer than six months to provide, so we may extend the time limit by agreeing this with you.
- We'll provide a public sewer extension by an agreed date if you have paid a deposit. If the work is delayed, you'll be entitled to interest for each three-

month period. The rate of interest is set by the Utility Regulator.

## Work on public sewers

When we carry out work on public roads:

- We'll provide advance notice to road users where necessary. Our advance notice signage is placed on-site and includes start and end dates. We'll also advise if the work is going to take place outside of normal working hours, for example at night.
- We'll inform local business-owners and residents if we potentially have to close a footpath.
- We'll try to cause as little disruption as possible.
- We'll make sure the work is safe for the public at all times.
- We'll restore the road or footpath to a safe, usable condition and to the standard set out in the Street Works (Northern Ireland) Order 2007. Temporary reinstatement to allow for settlement may be required in some cases.

# Our Promises: at a glance

## continued

### Work on private land

- We'll give you at least 42 days' written notice before the work starts if we need to access your land to make changes to an existing sewer.
- We'll advise you in writing, providing at least 3 months' notice before we start the work if we are going to put in a sewer. These time limits do not apply for sewers or lateral drains that you, or a developer, request.
- We'll try to cause as little disruption, inconvenience and damage as possible when we're working on your land.
- When we finish the work, we'll repair any damage or pay you compensation for any loss or damage we cause or that occurs as a result of our work when appropriate.

### Getting land to lay new sewers

- We'll arrange for someone to visit you to explain what will happen and tell you what your rights are if we need to use our right to acquire land.

### Septic tanks

- We'll offer a desludging service to you once every 12 months free of charge.
- We aim to desludge your septic tank within 12 working days of your request.

### Responding to you Answering your questions

- We'll answer the phone within 45 seconds when you call.
- We'll try to deal with your questions straight away if you phone us.
- We'll reply within 10 working days, or sooner if possible, if you write to us.
- We'll explain what we need to do and we'll contact you within 10 working days, or sooner if possible, if we need to investigate your complaint.
- If you make a complaint in writing or by mail, it will be assigned to a Customer Service Officer, who'll keep you informed while any necessary investigations are progressing.

### Keeping appointments

- When we make an appointment with you we'll aim to agree a time that suits all parties.
- We'll try to keep all appointments. If we need to cancel or change an appointment, we'll give you at least 24 hours' notice.
- We'll try to let you know if an emergency prevents us from keeping an appointment.



# The sewerage system

**The sewerage system is the network of pipes we use to collect and carry domestic wastewater, and commercial and industrial wastewater so we can treat it and get rid of it safely.**

## The different types of public sewers

1. Foul sewers carry wastewater from cooking and washing, waste from toilets and waste from businesses to our wastewater treatment works.
2. Surface-water (or storm) sewers carry rainwater collected from roofs and paved areas.
3. Combined sewers carry wastewater and surface water to our wastewater treatment works. We no longer build combined sewers.

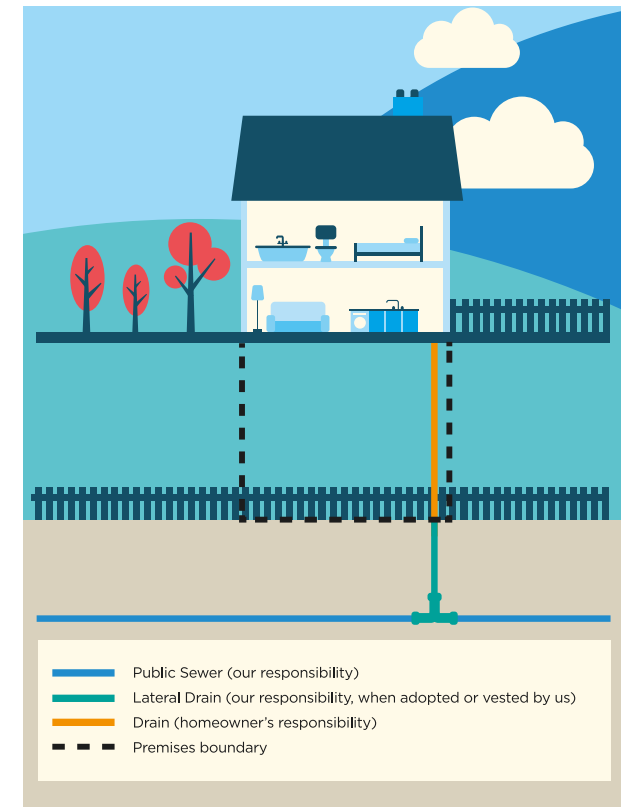
There are other drainage systems that do not fall under the remit of Northern Ireland Water.

It is an offence to put wastewater into a sewer designed for surface water. You should not connect surface water to a sewer designed for wastewater without getting our permission first.

All new sewerage systems should be designed with separate systems for wastewater and surface water (which may include a sustainable drainage system).

## Responsibility for pipework

The diagram on the right shows a typical layout outlining different parts of the sewerage system and who is responsible for each.



# The sewerage system continued

## The sewerage system is made up of the following:

- Drains that carry sewage from individual homes to the boundary of the street. You are normally responsible for the drain.
- Lateral drains are pipes under public land that go from the boundary of the street to the existing public or private sewer.
- Public sewers are pipes that carry wastewater from more than one home. Public sewers are usually under public roads and footpaths. We are responsible for public sewers.
- Private sewers are pipes that collect and carry wastewater from several homes, usually within a private development. A private sewer may connect to a public sewer or private wastewater treatment works. We are not responsible for private sewers or private wastewater treatment works.

## Dealing with flooding from public sewers

Public sewers are designed to protect homes from the risk of flooding. The weather will always create a risk of flooding and there may be times when very wet weather causes our sewers to flood. Sewers can also flood for other reasons – for example, if they get blocked or collapse.

We are responsible for removing blockages in public sewers, but not in private sewers or drains.

## What can be flushed? The 3P's:

- Poo
- Pee
- Paper.

The sewerage system is designed to cope with human waste and toilet paper. To prevent blockages the following items should never be flushed into the sewer:

- Nappies and baby wipes
- Fats, oils and grease
- Cotton buds
- Cotton wool
- Sanitary products
- Razor blades and toothbrushes.



# What to do if the public sewer floods

**Unfortunately, sewers do sometimes flood. We understand the upset and inconvenience this causes, particularly if sewage enters your home. We aim to deal with flooding from sewers quickly and help as much as possible afterwards.**

If a sewer floods, you should phone Waterline as quickly as possible so we can give you help and advice. Alternatively, you can report flooding through the Flooding Incident Line on **0300 200 0100** and your details will be passed to the most appropriate organisation.

If you're on our Customer Care Register and you tell us that your home is being flooded, we'll be able to respond more quickly. To register for free, please visit our website: [www.niwater.com/customer-care-register/](http://www.niwater.com/customer-care-register/)

You can also register by calling Waterline **0345 744 0088**

**You can  
report flooding  
by calling  
0300 200 0100**



# Our Promises

- We'll be there within 4 hours of receiving your call, or sooner where possible, if your home is flooded internally with wastewater from one of our sewers.
- We'll unblock public sewers as quickly as possible. If you call us, we'll respond and unblock the sewer within 8 hours. We'll provide you with a leaflet that gives you advice on how to deal with flooding.
- After a sewer floods, we'll help you clean up. We'll do a litter pick, wash down hard surfaces, and disinfect the area. This is the practice recommended by the Water Research Council. This clean-up will normally take place when we attend to the sewer flooding but there will be occasions when this will be postponed with your agreement.

There are times when these promises do not apply. For example, if the fault or blockage is in your private drains or sewers. In these cases, your insurance company may be able to help. They also do not apply if the flooding is caused by exceptional events, such as a river or stream overflowing or extreme rainfall. In these cases, you should report this to Flooding Incident Line on 0300 200 0100.

We're not legally responsible for loss or damage caused by flooding that is beyond our control. However, NI Water will work with other flood response agencies to offer assistance at flooding incidents caused by these exceptional events.

If you're affected by flooding, your insurance company may be able to help and you should contact them as soon as possible.

Please visit [niwater.com](https://www.niwater.com) for more information and advice on flooding.



# Treating wastewater

**Sewers carry wastewater from homes and businesses to wastewater treatment works, where we treat and get rid of it safely. After we have treated it, the cleaned water (effluent) must meet conditions set by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) before it goes to a nearby river, lough or the sea.**

The NIEA monitors and tests the effluent to make sure it meets strict standards. The NIEA records the results of these tests in a public register. You can arrange to inspect this register by contacting the NIEA. Details are on page 17.

As part of the process of treating water, we produce sludge. We treat this sludge again to meet European Commission requirements.

## Maps of the public sewers

We keep maps of the public sewers. We do not have records of the private sewers within private property. To get a copy of

a map, please fill in an application form (available on our website) and email to: [developerservices@niwater.com](mailto:developerservices@niwater.com) or post to Developer Services Team at:

 **Northern Ireland Water**  
188 Larne Road  
Ballymena  
BT42 3HA

There is a small charge for this service. To discuss your application, or to make an appointment to look at our maps free of charge at the above-mentioned office, please contact us on Waterline.

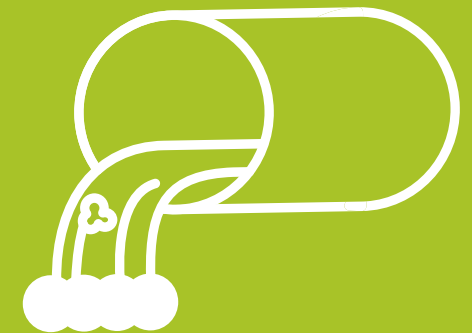
## New connections to public sewers

You can connect your drains to our sewerage system, so long as:

- this is practical
- you pay all the costs
- you obtain permission beforehand and meet the conditions of the application process

- you meet the requirements of the roads authority where applicable (written evidence needs to be provided)
- you use an approved contractor.

Northern Ireland Water is the approved utility for the installation of sewers in a public street and can provide this service for you.



# How to apply

**If you want us to connect you to the public sewer, you must apply to us in writing. You can get information on how to apply and an application form on the Services for Developers section of our website.**

## **Our Promises**

- We'll give you our decision within 21 calendar days of the date we receive your application and all relevant details (subject to an assessment of the capacity at the local wastewater infrastructure).

## **If we approve your application:**

- We'll tell you all the necessary costs and when these need to be paid.
- We'll explain all of the conditions you have to meet.

You must pay all charges before you start to make the connection.

## **For each new connection, you will have to pay:**

- a charge for us inspecting the work or carrying out the work ourselves
- a fixed contribution, which we invest back into our local sewerage network (this is called an 'infrastructure charge').

Only our contractor, or one we have approved, may carry out the work. If the connection is carried out by our contractor, a date for the work will be arranged with you after you've paid the charges. We'll aim to make a connection within 21 calendar days, subject to all payments and statutory approvals being in place, or by agreement to suit specific customer requirements. For full service connections, DfI Roads approval is needed and in some cases this may result in needing more than 21 days to complete.

We'll be responsible for all excavation and reinstatement work in the public highway associated with the sewer connection. If you choose to use an approved contractor, you must give us at least 7 calendar days' notice of the day your contractor will be doing the work. We'll then inspect the connection to make sure it meets our standards.

You'll be responsible for excavating the trench, exposing the sewer, making the connection, backfilling the excavation, and completing reinstatement. We'll charge you for inspecting the connection. This charge must be paid before you start work.

## **If we refuse your application**

If we refuse your application, we'll tell you why. If you don't agree with our decision, you can contact the Consumer Council. You can find their contact details on page 15 of this document.

# What if there's no sewer to connect to?

**Sometimes an extension of the public sewer may be needed if there's no sewer close to your home. You can ask us to provide a new sewer, either on your own or with your neighbours. This is known as a 'requisitioning process'. We'll provide a new sewer if it is possible, and there will be charges to pay for this. We'll give an allowance towards the cost of the new sewer.**

Information on how to requisition a sewer, and the required application form, is available on our website. If you would like to discuss this, please contact our Developer Services team by email ([developerservices@niwater.com](mailto:developerservices@niwater.com)) or on Waterline.

## **Our Promises**

- We'll tell you our decision within two months of the date we receive your application.
- If we agree to make a new sewer available for you to use, we must provide it within six months of the day you pay the charges or the day we agree the connection details,

whichever is later. Some major schemes need longer than six months to provide, so we may extend the time limit by agreeing this with you.

- We'll provide a public sewer extension by an agreed date if you have paid a deposit. If the work is delayed, you'll be entitled to interest for each three-month period. The rate of interest is set by the Utility Regulator.

# Taking responsibility for sewers and lateral drains in new developments

**When a new development is built, the developer will install the sewers and drains. The developer will be responsible for the sewers. If the sewers have been built to the standard required by us, the developer can ask us to take responsibility for the sewers through a formal process.**

We'll only take responsibility for the sewers and lateral drains once we're satisfied that they have been built in line with the conditions of the agreement. The developer must apply to us and pay administration, inspection, adoption and legal fees.

## **Taking responsibility for existing private sewers and lateral drains**

Sometimes we can take over responsibility from you for existing private sewers and lateral drains, as long as they're built to our standards and have

been properly maintained. If you want us to do this, you'll have to pay administration, inspection, adoption and legal fees plus the costs of any repairs needed to bring them up to a suitable standard. Once we have taken over the sewers and lateral drains, we will maintain them.

Details of how to apply to have sewers adopted, and the required application forms, are available on our website. If you want to discuss what you need to do, call our Developer Services Team on Waterline.

## **Work on public sewers**

Our sewers are usually under roads or in public open places.

## **Our Promises**

When we carry out work on public roads:

- We'll provide advance notice to road users where necessary. Our advance notice signage is placed on-site and

includes start and end dates. We'll also advise if the work is going to take place outside of normal working hours, for example at night.

- We'll inform local business-owners and residents if we potentially have to close a footpath.
- We'll try to cause as little disruption as possible.
- We'll make sure the work is safe for the public at all times.
- We'll restore the road or footpath to a safe, usable condition and to the standard set out in the Street Works (Northern Ireland) Order 2007. Temporary reinstatement to allow for settlement may be required in some cases.

# Work on private land

**Sometimes our sewers run through private land. We may need to come onto your land to maintain or inspect the public sewerage system. We have a legal right to do so, as long as we give you notice. We'll contact you before we do any work and tell you in writing what we need to do.**

In an emergency, we may need to come onto your land without giving you notice, but we'll always try to contact you beforehand.

## Our Promises

- We'll give you at least 42 days' written notice before the work starts if we need to access your land to make changes to an existing sewer.
- We'll advise you in writing providing at least 3 months' notice before we start the work if we are going to put in a sewer. These time limits do not apply for sewers or lateral drains that you, or a developer, request.

- We'll try to cause as little disruption, inconvenience and damage as possible when we are working on your land.
- When we finish the work, we'll repair any damage or pay you compensation for any loss or damage we cause or that occurs as a result of our work when appropriate.

Our Code of Practice on Work on Private Land will spell out, in more detail, our promises to you.

## Getting land to lay new sewers

We have the right to lay new sewers. We'll try to agree this with you and we'll pay you compensation.

## Our Promise

- We'll arrange for someone to visit you to explain what will happen and tell you what your rights are if we need to use our right to acquire land.

Our Code of Practice on Work on Private Land is available on our website.

## Building over or near a public sewer

You must get our permission to build over or near the public sewer if you are within 3 metres or 1.5 times the depth of an existing pipeline (whichever is greater). If our sewers run through private land, we usually set up agreements with the person who owns the land so they know the conditions they must keep to if they want to build over or near our sewer.

You must contact us if the building work you are planning would go over the ground the existing public sewer is under. If you apply for our permission, you will have to:

- pay for an inspection
- pay our technical assessment fee
- if we carry out any work, pay our costs.

**If you want to discuss your plans, please call our Developer Services Team on Waterline.**

# Moving an existing sewer

**In the past, we often built sewers within private land. In some cases, these sewers may prevent you from developing the land or extending your home. You may be able to move the sewer if we agree. We may be able to move our larger sewers for you if this is practical. You can find details of the procedures for moving existing sewers on our website.**

## Septic tanks

Your home may not be connected to the public sewerage system, and we offer a desludging service for customers whose household wastewater goes into:

- a septic tank
- a cesspool
- a domestic treatment plant.

This includes removing and treating up to 4.5 cubic metres of sludge. This service is currently free of charge once in any 12-month period. We must be able to enter your property and access your tank safely.

This service is provided on request and can be arranged through our self-service website ([digitalservices.niwater.com/desludge-open](https://digitalservices.niwater.com/desludge-open)) or by phoning Waterline.

## Our Promises

- We'll offer a desludging service to you once every 12 months free of charge.
- We aim to desludge your septic tank within 12 working days of your request.

**If you need more information, please visit our website.**



# Bogus callers

**Occasionally criminals visit people's homes and claim to be working for us. These people are 'bogus callers'. They can be men or women and may try to trick you by saying there is an urgent problem with your water. All our staff and contractors working on our behalf carry identity cards with their photo and the NI Water logo on it.**

If we are carrying out work, our staff may need to go into your property. Always ask to see their identity card. If someone comes to your door claiming to work for us, please do the following:

- Check that your windows and front and back doors are locked.
- Stop and think, 'Am I expecting anyone?'

- Ask the caller to put their identity card through your letterbox, rather than opening the door.
- If you have one, attach your door chain before you open your door.

If the identity card is genuine, it will have the following information on it:

- a picture of the person at your door
- a unique serial number
- the date the card was issued
- the person's name
- the person's signature
- our logo.

You can check that the person is who they say they are by phoning Quick Check on 101. Your call will be answered by a trained police call handler who will take the details from you and will then

contact Northern Ireland Water to determine whether the caller is genuine. Our staff will not mind waiting while you check their details. If you're not sure, don't open your door.

## Password scheme

If you're on our Customer Care Register, you can ask for a password to help you identify our staff. Please arrange a password with us. Our staff will always use this password when they visit you.

If someone claims to work for us but doesn't know your password, don't let them in. Instead, please get in touch with us and we'll check to see if the caller really works for us.

## QUICK CHECK

Call the police  
on 101 for quick check





# What to do if you're unhappy with our services

It's important to us always to provide the best possible service. So, if you ever feel we've fallen short of this, we'd like to hear from you. We'll work with you to put things right as quickly as possible and will always try to use your feedback to improve things for our customers.

For details of how we handle complaints, please refer to Our Complaints Procedure which is available on our website.

## Responding to you

These are the standards you can expect from us when you contact us.

## Our Promises

### Answering your questions

- We'll answer the phone within 45 seconds when you call.
- We'll try to deal with your questions straightaway if you phone us.
- We'll reply within 10 working days, or sooner if possible, if you write to us.
- We'll explain what we need to do and we'll contact you within 10 working days, or sooner if possible, if we need to investigate your complaint.

- If you make a complaint in writing or by email, it will be assigned to a Customer Service Officer, who will keep you informed while any necessary investigations are progressing.

### Keeping appointments

- When we make an appointment with you we'll aim to agree a time that suits all parties.
- We'll try to keep all appointments. If we need to cancel or change an appointment, we'll give you at least 24 hours' notice.
- We'll try to let you know if an emergency prevents us from keeping an appointment.

### Confidentiality

We treat all information you give us securely and hold it in strict confidence. Access to information by employees and others working on behalf of Northern Ireland Water will be on a 'need to know' basis only. Where we hold personal information, it will be processed in compliance with the Data Protection legislation.

If you authorise somebody else to contact us on your behalf, we may include personal information where relevant to the response.

### Independent help and advice from 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. It can also provide assistance if you are 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)

# Further Information

**This Code of Practice is part of a set of information leaflets about us and our services. The other Codes of Practice in the set include:**

**‘Water Supply Services’:** This gives you information on our code of practice for water services.

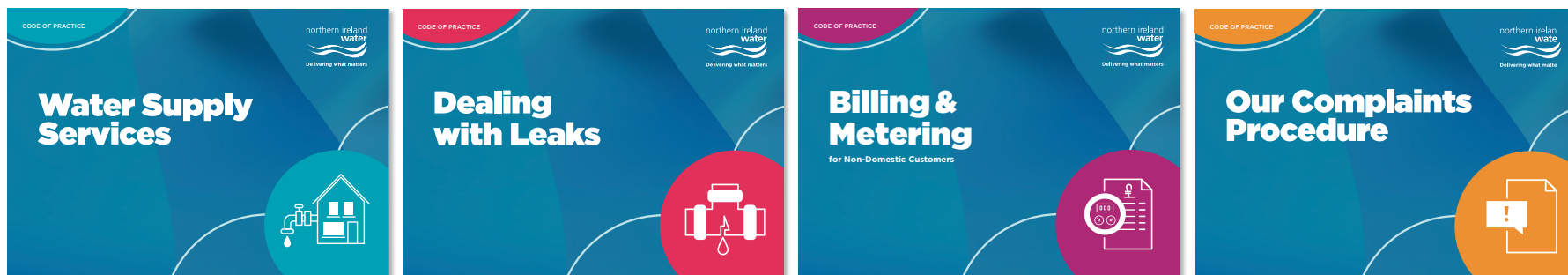
**‘Dealing with Leaks’:** This gives you information on our code of practice on leaks and who owns pipes.

**‘Work on Private Land’:** This gives you information on our code of practice if we need to work on private land.

**‘Billing & Metering for Non-Domestic Customers’:** This gives you information on our codes of practice on billing and metering arrangements.

**‘Our Complaints Procedure’:** This gives you information on who to contact and how we’ll manage your complaint.

We offer a range of other information leaflets, all of which are available on our website.



# Other Useful Contacts

## The Utility Regulator

The Utility Regulator 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 Environment Agency (NIEA)

NIEA offers advice on specific issues to do with preventing pollution. NIEA also provides an emergency pollution hotline that you can phone at any time to report pollution: **0800 80 70 60**

 **Northern Ireland Environment Agency**  
Water Management Unit  
17 Antrim Road Lisburn BT28 3AL

 **Phone:** 028 9262 3100

 **Email:** [waterinfo@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:waterinfo@daera-ni.gov.uk)

 **Website:** [www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)



 **Northern Ireland Water**  
PO Box 1026  
Belfast BT1 9DJ

 **Waterline**  
03457 440088

 **Text Relay Service**  
03457 440088

 **Self-Service**  
<https://digitalservices.niwater.com>

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

 **Web Chat**  
[www.niwater.com/contact-us/](http://www.niwater.com/contact-us/)

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

 **Twitter**  
[www.twitter.com/niwnews](http://www.twitter.com/niwnews)

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