

Code of Practice on leakage

for domestic customers



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This Code of Practice applies to domestic customers only.

This Code is one of a number of Codes of Practice which have been approved by the Water Industry Regulator, Ofwat. Details of all South West Water Codes of Practice can be found on our website – **southwestwater.co.uk**.

If you pay metered charges for water and sewerage services, this Code sets out how we are able to help with the cost of replacing or repairing your underground private service pipe if you have a leak and what we will do if you have a large bill because of the leak.

If you pay unmeasured charges for water and sewerage services, this Code sets out how we are able to help with the cost of replacing or repairing your underground private service pipe if you have a leak. In your case the leak will not cause your bill to increase so you will not be entitled to any allowance against your bill.

If your property is used for both domestic and commercial purposes, the sections relating to replacement and repair of service pipes apply to you. However the terms on which we may grant you a leak allowance against your bill will depend on whether or not the domestic use of your property is the primary use of the property and whether or not the leak is on a section of pipe that serves the domestic part of your property. If you are not entitled to a leak allowance under this Code of Practice for domestic customers, you may be entitled to an allowance under leak policies for commercial customers. Our separate information leaflet “Help with Leakage for Commercial Customers” is available to explain our policies for commercial leaks.

Responsibility for pipework

As a customer, it is very important for you to be aware that you have responsibilities to maintain the service pipe which delivers water into your home.

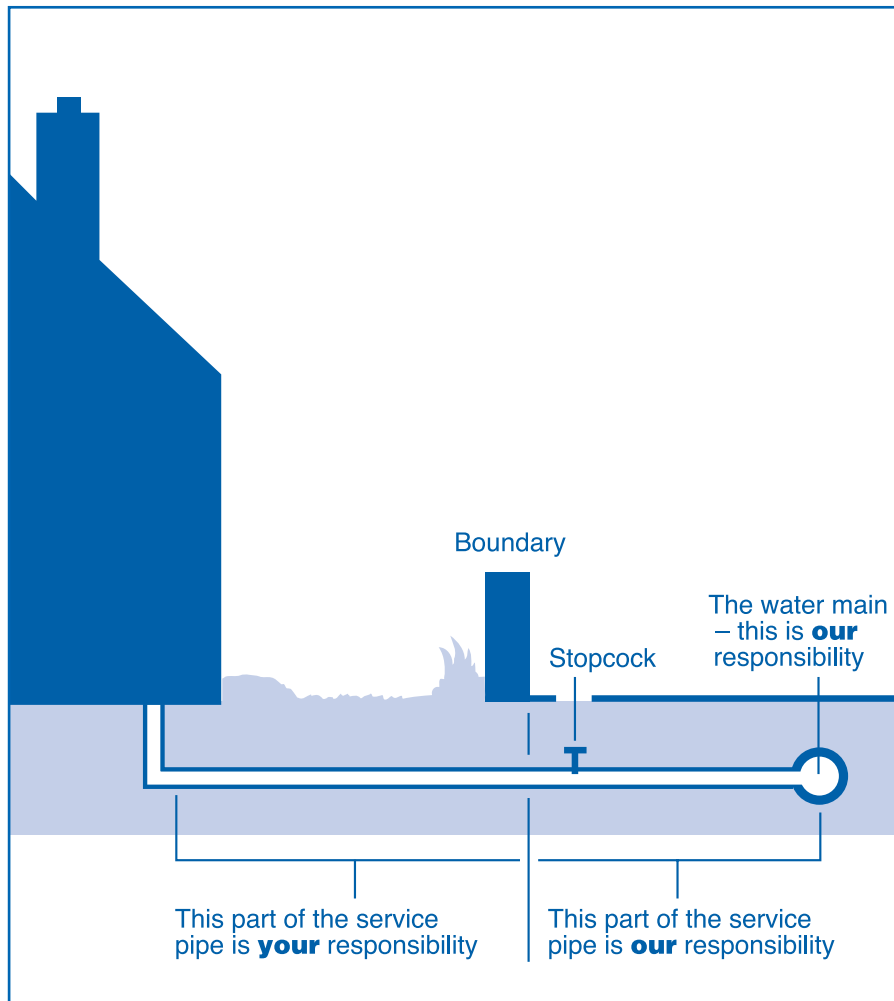
The diagram overleaf shows generally, which pipes are your responsibility and which are our responsibility.

If you live in a house that is some distance from our water main, it's likely that you'll have a very long service pipe. Please remember, you are responsible for the entire length of the service pipe from your house, right the way to the boundary of the street in which our main is laid (or to the main itself if our main is not laid in the street), even though it may pass through other people's property.

Your home may also share its service pipe with one or more neighbouring properties. In this case you will have joint responsibility with the other property owners for the section or sections of pipe which provide water to your property and those of your neighbours, and sole responsibility for the section of pipe that provides water only to your own property.

If you need help to confirm who is responsible for your particular service pipe, please call our **Services Helpline** free of charge on **0800 169 1144** (for Minicom users only 0800 169 9965), open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We will be only too pleased to help.

Responsibility for Pipework diagram



Leaks on your pipework

We have a duty to reduce leakage and at the same time promote the efficient use of water. It is a precious, often undervalued commodity which should not be taken for granted. We work hard to reduce leakage from our own pipes and to ensure we meet our targets set by Ofwat.

Water escaping from a leak is a loss of a costly and valuable resource, so if a leak is reported or detected on your pipework, we will ask you to repair it.

In the unlikely event that you fail to comply with such a request, we can serve a legal notice requiring a repair to be carried out. Failing to repair a leak when asked may also lead to you not getting an allowance on your bill in respect of the water that is leaking.

If this is still not done we can carry out the repair ourselves and recover our costs from the person responsible for the pipe. In cases where escaping water is in danger of causing damage or danger to persons or property, we can turn off the supply until a repair is carried out.

We usually allow 30 days for a leak to be repaired, although in some circumstances we can issue a 10 day notice for a leak to be repaired.

If you do not own your property, your landlord should be responsible for repairing the leak for you. If you are a tenant, it is your responsibility to pass any information on.

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

Leakage checks made when a meter is installed for the first time

We know that a substantial amount of water escapes from unidentified leaks on customers' underground service pipes. When we install a meter on an existing supply, we will check to see whether your private service pipe is leaking by confirming that the meter is not moving when you are not using any water in your home. This check may also indicate that you have a leak on your internal plumbing and you will need to get a plumber to help you fix this.

If there is a leak on the underground pipe which is within the excavation we have made to install the meter, we will repair it free of charge. However, if additional excavation is required, you will be responsible for repairing the leak yourself. We may make a contribution toward the cost of this repair.

If you do not repair it within 30 days, you will be charged for all of the water used.

Position of your water meter

The location of your meter will be determined by us in accordance with regulations set by Government. Meters may be installed either internally or externally near to the boundary of the property served.

If you have particular physical needs that mean you cannot check your meter reading when you need to because of its location, we will register you on our Priority Services Register so that you can ask us to check the meter reading for you. We will not check a meter and provide you with a reading more than once a month however.

Should this not resolve your concerns about checking your meter reading, we will consider moving the meter but only if we can find a location for it that makes it more accessible for you to read; this alternative location is one which will allow the meter to measure all the water you use and only the water you use; and significant alterations to your household fittings or plumbing are not required. Where we do agree to move a meter in these circumstances, we will not make a charge for moving it.

What will South West Water do to help if you have a leak?

If you have a leak on your internal plumbing, you will need to get a plumber to help you fix it. We will not be able to help you fix an internal leak or help you with the cost of repairs.

If you have a leak on your private underground service pipe, while we will not help you find and repair the leak, we will subsidise your costs of having the leak fixed and we can provide you with a list of contractors who may be able to help you find and fix the leak on your service pipe (see "Financial help" on page 6 for details of conditions relating to subsidising your costs of replacement or repair).

Repair or replace?

A leak is likely to be a sign that your private underground service pipe is wearing out. Often repairing one leak will cause the pipe to leak somewhere else because the pressure in the pipe has been improved by repairing the first leak and other parts of the service pipe can't cope. Black alkathene pipes are most at risk of multiple leaks once one has happened.

Once you have a leak it may well be better, and safer, for you to replace the pipe rather than just repair the leak. This is why we will make a much larger contribution to your costs if you replace the pipe rather than repair it (see "Financial help" on page 6).

Also, we do not guarantee to give you more than one leak allowance if you have a high bill because of a leak. We may give a discretionary second allowance but if you have repaired rather than replaced a previously leaking service pipe we will expect you to have kept a close eye on meter readings since the first leak to check that the pipe is not leaking again in order to qualify for a second allowance. We will not give more than two allowances and you will have to pay full charges if you do have a leak more than twice.

Financial help

Once your service pipe has been replaced in its entirety, send us a copy of the invoice for the work and providing that it was done within 30 days of you becoming aware of the leak, we will make a 'once only' discretionary contribution of up to £250 towards your costs.

If you only have a leak repaired or your service pipe partially replaced, again send us a copy of the invoice for the work and our discretionary contribution will be up to £100 – provided again that the work was carried out within 30 days of you becoming aware of the leak.

Should your leak be on a section of joint service pipe for which you and a number of neighbours are responsible, we will make an appropriate contribution towards the costs of replacement or repair each of the householders paying incur. For example if four of you have to pay £800 to have your service pipe replaced, we will pay £200 to each of you.

NB: 'once only' means one contribution per customer, per property. So even if you have received a contribution for a service pipe repair or renewal at a previous property, you will still be entitled to another contribution in the event of a leak if you move house.

Leak allowances for customers paying metered charges

If you have a water meter, you are responsible for all of the consumption registered on the meter, even if the consumption is higher than usual because of a leak on your service pipe. Therefore, you will be paying for water which is wasted by leakage from your pipework.

However, the first time you have a leak on your underground private service pipe we will grant you an allowance for both the water and sewerage elements of your bill so that you do not pay any more than you usually pay. To qualify for an allowance the leak must be stopped by replacing your service pipe, or repairing the leak, within 30 days of receiving a notice from us suggesting that you might have a leak or receiving a bill showing higher than normal water use (which should cause you to check for a leak).

Allowances will only be backdated over the last two scheduled meter readings. If a leak has been running for longer than that period, we will only provide an allowance for the water lost during the last two meter reading periods. This includes restricting allowances for sewerage charges to the same timescales.

No allowance will be granted where:

- (a) water is escaping from pipework or fittings other than underground service pipes
- (b) a leak has been caused by negligence or wilful damage caused by you, your family or agents
- (c) a bill or notice from us should have alerted you to the possibility that you have a leak and you failed to have it fixed within 30 days.

Subsequent leaks

If you have a second leak after we have granted you a leak allowance, we may grant you a further leak allowance however this will be at our discretion. To qualify you will need to explain how you have been checking for leakage regularly and show that you spotted the leak as early as you could and had it repaired quickly.

We will not give any customer more than two leak allowances for the same property – but if you move house and have a leak on the service pipe at your new home, you will be entitled to a leak allowance if the service pipe at your new property starts to leak.

We strongly recommend that you consider replacing your private service pipe if it starts to leak to avoid the chances of getting a high bill in the future which you will have to pay.

Adjustment of water supply charges

Where we agree to make a leak allowance we will adjust your water charges, on the basis of past normal consumption. Where there is no record of previous consumption, we will take a meter reading after the leak has been repaired and base an allowance on the consumption recorded. We will not ask you to pay until we have calculated your allowance.

Adjustment of sewerage charges

If you pay sewerage charges and we adjust your water charges because of a leak, we may make a similar adjustment to your sewerage charges.

If you need to apply for a leak allowance, please call our **Accounts Helpline** free of charge on **0800 169 1133** (for Minicom users only 0800 169 9965), open from 7am to 10pm, seven days a week. We will be only too pleased to help.

How to spot a leak

Water escaping from a leak on your private underground service pipe may not be obvious above ground (but wet areas or patches of lush vegetation in your garden in dry spells could suggest a leak). **If you have an external meter, it is important to keep a regular check on your meter readings to help you identify an underground leak at an early stage.**

We would recommend that you check your meter reading at least once a month.

A bill showing higher than normal consumption may also be an indication that you have a leak on your service pipe.

If you suspect that you might have a leak, you can check the situation by noting the reading on **all** the dials on the meter; turning off all water-using apparatus in your house for a couple of hours and checking the meter reading again. If the dials have moved, then you probably do have a leak. To check that it is on your under-ground pipe and not inside your property, you should then turn off your internal stop cock and check the meter again. If the dials have moved again, or are moving while the stopcock is turned off, the leak is probably on your underground pipe.

If you believe your meter is recording consumption inaccurately, you may require us to test the accuracy of the meter supplying your property. However, there will be a charge for this if the test shows that the meter is correctly recording consumption.

Reporting a leaking service pipe

If you need to report a leak on your service pipe please call our 24-hour **Services Helpline** free of charge on **0800 169 1144** (for Minicom users only 0800 169 9965).

Reporting other leaks

We are very grateful to customers who report leaks from our water mains to us. These can be reported on our 24-hour **Services Helpline** free of charge on **0800 169 1144** (for Minicom users only 0800 169 9965) or via our website **southwestwater.co.uk** (selecting 'Emergencies' and then the 'Report a leak' option).

If you are not satisfied

Please let us know. If you have a complaint about how we have dealt with you when contacting us about a leak or applying a leak allowance, you can let us know by telephoning our **Services Helpline** on **0800 169 1144** in respect of matters relating to the leak itself or our **Accounts Helpline** on **0800 169 1133** in respect of a leak allowance. Please call between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday.

Alternatively you can email a complaint to us by visiting our website at **southwestwater.co.uk** and selecting the "Contact Us" option. A written complaint can be sent us at South West Water, PO Box 4762, Worthing, BN11 9NT.

In the unlikely event that we are not able to resolve a complaint to your full satisfaction and our position has been reviewed by a senior South West Water manager, you can refer your concerns to the Consumer Council for Water Western Region (CCWater) who will investigate independently. CCWater are an independent statutory body who protect the customer interests and investigate customer complaints.

You can contact them at:
Consumer Council for Water,
Western Region, First Floor,
Broadwalk House,
Southernhay West,
Exeter EX1 1TS

Telephone: 0845 795 9059
(Minicom 0121 345 1044)

Email: southwest@ccwater.org.uk

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