

Code of Practice on our Wastewater Services

In this leaflet we explain how we dispose of your wastewater, the different types of sewers, responsibilities for pipework, wastewater treatment, the adoption of private sewers and who to contact if you need to.

A list of other Codes of Practice can be found on the back of this leaflet. You can download them from our website, southwestwater.co.uk/cop, or call us on 0344 346 1010 for a free copy.

We provide drinking water and wastewater services to Cornwall, Devon and small areas of Dorset and Somerset. The resident population of the region is approximately 1.8 million and in the peak tourist months the number of people we serve increases to over two million.

About 95% of the water we supply is returned to us for treatment and disposal. We do this through over 17,500 kilometres of sewers, around 1,200 sewage pumping stations and 650 wastewater treatment works, many of which serve a population of less than 1,000 people.



What wastewater services are provided?

We maintain a network of public sewers which takes the wastewater from your home for treatment and safe disposal. We have a duty to provide and maintain an adequate wastewater system for the region where we operate.

How does the wastewater system work?

The wastewater system is a network of sewer pipes used to collect and take wastewater and rainwater from properties for treatment and disposal.

Your sewerage system is likely to be one of the following three types:

- A foul sewer, which takes only wastewater, such as waste from kitchens and bathrooms for example
- A surface water sewer, which takes only domestic rain water from roofs and some hardstanding areas (it may also take some highway drainage water)
- A combined sewer, which takes both wastewater and surface water. This type of sewer was laid mainly before the 1960s and tends to be more susceptible to flooding during heavy rainfall

Our sewers aren't intended to drain floodwater from rivers or run-off from agricultural land or deal with highway drainage. Local authorities have responsibility for highway drainage even in locations where much of it's connected to one of our sewers.

How is wastewater treated?

Wastewater treatment is the process of removing contaminants from wastewater. It includes physical, chemical and biological processes to remove contaminants and produce environmentally safe treated wastewater and biosolids.

The sewage effluent which is discharged to inland or tidal waters must comply with statutory standards set by the Environment Agency. The Environment Agency undertakes checks to ensure that we meet their standards, and records showing the results of samples are held in a public register.

We ensure that all biosolids from our wastewater treatment works are recycled in accordance with statutory requirements and Government licences.

We aim to minimise odours from our wastewater treatment works as much as possible but if you experience a problem, please call our Services Helpline. Contact numbers are at the back of this leaflet.

Types of domestic drainage

Changes to sewer ownership on 1 October 2011 mean there are different types of drainage as shown in the table:

Definition	Description	Ownership
Private drain	Pipework draining a single property/ premises and located within the property boundary	Property owner
Private sewer	Pipework draining more than one property which does not connect with a public sewer	Property owner
Public drain (lateral)	Pipework draining a single property/ premises located outside of the boundary and connecting into the public sewer	South West Water
Public sewer	Pipework draining more than one property which connects with a public sewer	South West Water

What can cause flooding from sewers?

Flooding from sewers can be caused by a number of reasons such as:

- Storms and high levels of rainfall causing an overloaded sewer
- Tree roots or items and material unsuitable for disposal down a sewer causing blockages or sewer collapses
- A pumping station or equipment breakdown.

Drainage responsibility

We're responsible for over 17,000 kilometres of public sewers, many of which were previously the responsibility of private individuals. Responsibility for a large number of former private sewers and lateral drains was transferred to us in October 2011.

These sewers and drains are generally situated in gardens, roads or open public spaces. Sometimes our public sewer network runs through private land, in which case we have a legal right of access for maintenance purposes. We're also entitled by law to prevent building taking place over or near our sewers which could damage them or restrict our ability to maintain them properly. If you're considering building over or near to a public sewer please talk to us first.

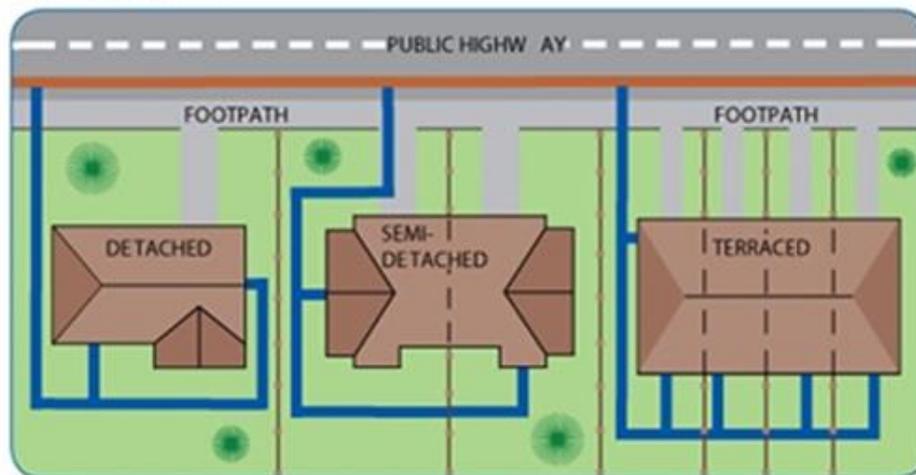
Private drains which carry your household's sewage and surface water are your responsibility to the point where they either leave your property boundary or connect with our public sewer, whichever comes first.

You're responsible for all private pipework inside your property boundary which serves just your property. If you have a shared sewer which serves more than one property, we'll be responsible for the section of the pipe from the boundary of your property to the point where it joins the main sewer. All property owners will remain responsible for the section of pipe which serves only their property and lies only within their boundary.

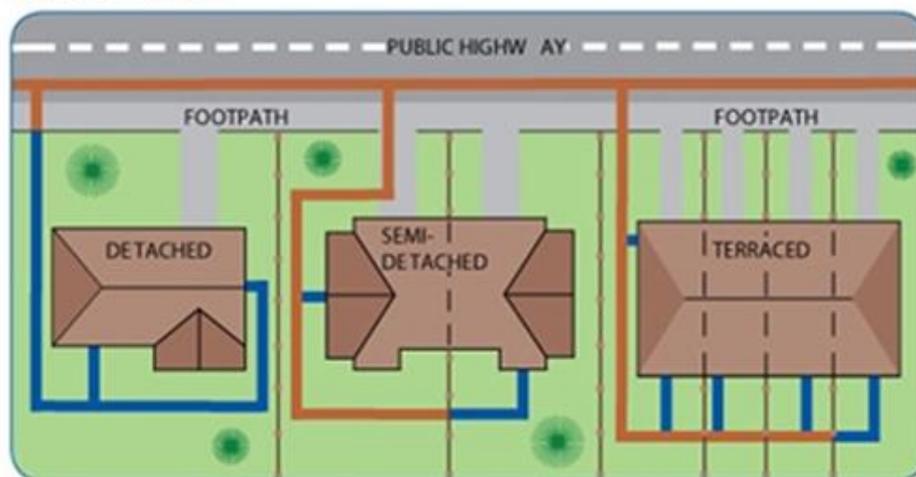
The diagrams on the next page show how ownership changed after the transfer. Please note these diagrams illustrate how common types of property are affected. It's possible that your property's drains may be laid out differently from those illustrated. For example, if a detached property shares drains with another property, these drains would be included in the transfer and if a terrace property doesn't share drains with another property, these drains wouldn't be included in the transfer.

There's more information on our website which will help you to identify who owns the sewer. You can find it at southwestwater.co.uk/privatesewers or we can help if you call us – see the back page for phone numbers.

Before the transfer



After the transfer



■ Public sewer/lateral drains – Responsibility of South West Water
■ Private drain – Responsibility of property owner(s)

Cesspits, septic tanks and pumping stations

Your property may be connected to a cesspit or septic tank. If so, it's your responsibility to empty and maintain the cesspit or septic tank and manage all of the drainage pipework associated with it.

Where foul or surface water flows can't be transferred solely by gravity, a pumping station and rising main may be involved.

Legislation triggered the automatic transfer of private pumping stations to our ownership with effect from 1 October 2016, where the pumping station:

- Served more than one property,
- If serving only one property, was situated outside of the boundary of that property, or
- Has a rising main that communicates with (is connected to) our sewer network.

Records

We keep records of our public sewers and you have the right to see them free of charge at our offices. We can make extract copies available for a small charge. Please contact Source for Searches on 08453 303401 for more information.

Private or unadopted sewers

Historically there were many sewers in our region that we didn't own. When they were built, or when they would normally have become public sewers, they either didn't meet the required standards or the owner or developer didn't want them to become public.

Government legislation brought many of these into our ownership to remove the burden from homeowners of maintaining pipework which lies outside of their property boundary. Sewers had to be connected to the public sewerage system by 1 July 2011 to be included in a blanket transfer on 1 October 2011.

Drainage systems connected to the public system after 1 July 2011 can still be private as there's no mandatory requirement to have them adopted although some developers do have them adopted. If you would like us to consider adopting your sewer, please see southwestwater.co.uk/developer-services.

If you're buying a property you should instruct your solicitor to check the status of drainage pipework within and outside your property boundary. Please see our website southwestwater.co.uk/privatesewers for more information on the adoption of sewers.

New connections to the public sewer¹

If you want to connect or communicate with a public sewer, you need to talk to us first about where and how you intend to connect. Please see our website southwestwater.co.uk/developer-services for further information.

You'll have to pay both a fee for the connection and an infrastructure charge for each new connection – we'll provide you with full information regarding both. You can find further information about our sewer infrastructure charges in our [New Connections and Developer Services Charging Arrangements](#).

In some cases permission can be refused, for example, if the connection will have a harmful effect on our sewers. If you're not happy with our decision, you're entitled to appeal to the industry regulator, Ofwat.

¹Some obligations do not currently apply to the Isles of Scilly. Please contact our developer services team for more information.

What happens if there's no public sewer?

Sometimes there may not be an existing public sewer adjacent to the site that can be used to serve your property. You may wish to lay a sewer from your site to a convenient point on the public system.

A sewer can be provided in a number of ways:

- You can design and install a sewer / lateral drain at your cost and for it to remain private
- You can design and install a sewer / lateral drain at your cost and seek adoption of it. This will require it to be built to the required standards
- We can design and install a sewer / lateral drain as part of a response to a requisition.
- As part of our first-time sewerage programme.

Requisition of new sewers or laterals for domestic purposes

If you have a new development site of more than one property with no access to a public sewer because you're unable to obtain the agreement of another landowner, we can normally lay a sewer or sewers to serve your site. We have legal powers to negotiate land entry, easements and compensation for crossing private land.

In the case of sewers, we're required to offer various methods of payment. For sewers we normally require financial security, usually in the form of a cash deposit to the value of our estimated cost of the works. Further details can be found in our [*New Connections and Developer Services Charging Arrangements*](#).

If you wish to connect non-domestic flows to our sewerage system, you'll need a trade effluent discharge consent. You'll need to submit a trade effluent notice providing details of the proposed flows. We may impose conditions to safeguard our sewers and wastewater treatment works. Please see [*southwestwater.co.uk/wholesale/trade-effluent-services*](https://southwestwater.co.uk/wholesale/trade-effluent-services) for further information

It's important that you contact us at the earliest possible stage as major works may be required to accommodate your development and this might require an agreement in relation to when you connect.

If you need to requisition a lateral drain for a single new property, we can provide this as a public lateral drain in a similar way. All costs will be fully recharged to you in this case. Payment in full becomes due after we've laid the drain and we normally require financial security in advance, usually in the form of a cash deposit to the value of our cost of the works.

If you're not happy with our decision, you're entitled to appeal to Ofwat – contact details are at the end of this leaflet.

First-time sewerage schemes

We're sometimes asked to consider providing a new sewerage system in an area lacking mains drainage and the application may be made by a district council, parish council or individual householder.

You should contact us for an initial discussion and an application form or see our website, southwestwater.co.uk/developer-services.

When the application has been made, we'll investigate whether the scheme is viable and confirm if and when it can proceed. If it's not viable, we'll advise you of your alternatives.

If you're not happy with our decision you are entitled to appeal to the Environment Agency.

Pipelaying in Private Land

Sometimes we have to lay pipes in land which is in private ownership or occupation. We have the legal right to do this but we'll consult you (the occupier and/or landowner) and through the use of good working practice, seek to minimise the disruption.

We'll complete reinstatement after our work and do our best to restore the land to its original condition. Where this is not practicable, we'll pay compensation for loss or damage caused by the works.

We have a code of practice for the exercise of pipelaying powers on private land that sets out good practice with regard to our powers and duties when we carry out such work. It also explains what you (the occupier and/or landowner) are entitled to expect. The Water Industry Act 1991 allows, and in some cases requires, us to undertake these works. It also lays down certain rules for us to follow when we lay, alter or maintain pipes and their associated accessories.

You can appeal against a decision regarding pipelaying to Ofwat.

Wastewater treatment

Our 650 wastewater treatment works receive sewage for treatment via public sewers and then safely discharge the cleaned effluent to nearby watercourses or the sea.

Our treatment works comply with standards set by the Environment Agency, a statutory body with powers and duties to protect and enhance the environment.

Wastewater treatment produces a by-product in the form of sewage sludge which is further treated and recycled in accordance with the standards set by the Environment Agency. The sludge formed during the treatment process can be turned into an effective fertiliser.

We aim to run our wastewater treatment works in a way that avoids or minimises problems to the public. If you feel any of our activities are causing a problem, please contact us using the details on the back of this document.

What can be done to protect against flooding from public sewers?

We aim to provide adequate capacity in our sewers to ensure homes aren't flooded by water escaping from them.

If there's a sewer blockage or pumping station breakdown which threatens to flood domestic premises, we aim to have a representative on site as quickly as possible and to start work within four hours as a minimum.

If you are worried about a sewer that looks like it is going to cause a flood, please call our Services Helpline on 0344 346 2020.

What happens if I'm affected by public sewer flooding?

Call our Services Helpline on 0344 346 2020 and we'll arrange to have a representative on site as quickly as possible to help with any external clearing up necessary as a result of flooding caused by water escaping from one of our sewers.

If your property has been flooded internally, we can recommend local based companies who are experts in dealing with property flooding to provide specialist services that may be required to help with the clean up.

We'll investigate the cause of the internal sewer flooding and we'll keep you informed about our investigations and let you know if there's any work that we need to carry out to rectify the problem.

If you experience internal flooding, our leaflet [*What to do if your property is flooded with sewage*](#) provides helpful information on action you can take.

The leaflet is also available on our website. If any damage has been caused, please contact your insurance company as soon as possible.

We're not liable for any damage caused by sewer flooding unless we've been negligent and have helped cause the problem. If you're not insured or your insurers decline to help, please contact us.

If your home is flooded, you may be entitled to a refund of your sewerage charges under [Our Customer Promise](#). You may also be entitled to a partial refund of charges if your garden has been flooded. Please see [Our Customer Promise](#) leaflet on our website or call our Services Helpline for details.

Reporting a suspected pollution

We're committed to protecting the environment. If you spot anything you think could be a pollution across Devon or Cornwall, please call us on 0344 346 2020 or complete the form on our website at southwestwater.co.uk/pollution so that we can investigate as a priority.

The signs of a suspected pollution of a river or stream could be:

- Sanitary products in the water, on land, on bathing beaches or the coast (toilet paper, tissues, wipes, faecal matter, condoms)
- Watercourse appears cloudy, milky or foamy
- Dead or gasping fish
- A noticeable sewage smell

What's done to prevent problems being caused by sewage odours?

Provided there are no blockages and the sewage keeps flowing freely in our sewers, odour problems shouldn't generally arise. If they do, this may indicate a problem either in your private drains or in our sewers. Occasionally, an odour problem may arise at one of our wastewater treatment works and we always work hard to find the cause and eliminate the odour as soon as we can.

Sometimes odour problems have another cause that isn't related to sewer systems, even though the smell is thought to be sewage. Examples would be muck spreading and problems arising from pig and chicken farming.

If you notice an odour that you believe is coming from either our sewers or a wastewater treatment works, please contact our Services Helpline on 0344 346 2020 and we'll investigate as quickly as possible.

Love Your Loo

Most people say they only flush the 3Ps – pee, paper and poo – down the loo.

But some people admit to contributing to 8,500 blocked sewers each year by flushing baby wipes, hygiene wipes, cleaning wipes, cleansing pads and sanitary products down the loo. These blockages cost about £4.5 million a year to deal with and add to customers' bills.

Blocked sewers can cause flooding, which is extremely unpleasant especially if it happens in your home, and can be easily avoided.

That's why we've launched a **Love Your Loo** campaign, supported by the Environment Agency, encouraging everyone to only flush the 3Ps.

Research has shown that people flush the wrong things because they're confused about what can and can't be flushed. Sometimes that's because the packaging is misleading. Many products say they're flushable and biodegradable – but they take so long to break down that they build up in pipes and cause blockages.

We're working with the rest of the water industry to encourage manufacturers and retailers to label their products responsibly.

We're encouraging everybody to only flush the 3Ps – pee, paper and poo – and to bag and bin soiled wipes and sanitary products. Cleaning wipes and cleansing pads can go straight in the bin.

Find out more at southwestwater.co.uk/loveyourloo.

Think Sink!

Each year, South West Water removes 4,000 tonnes of fat and food waste from the region's sewers – enough to fill 25 double-decker buses.

When hot fat, oil and grease cools it forms a solid mass which can build up inside your pipes. Even small amounts of fat, oil, grease and food waste contribute to blocked drains.

Our **Think Sink!** campaign encourages everyone to scrape leftovers from plates and pans into the bin and use a Gunk Pot or similar container to collect cooled fats, oils and grease from roasting trays and frying pans.

Find out more at southwestwater.co.uk/thinksink

Misconnections

A misconnection is when a home or business has wrongly connected their foul plumbing into the surface water system, which eventually discharges into rivers or streams via surface water outfalls, instead of to the sewerage network for treatment.

This can happen when a building is extended, during home improvements or when a property is built. For example, a washing machine or a shower drains to a Surface Water Sewer rather than the Foul Water Sewer. It is also when Surface Water is incorrectly directed into the Foul Water Sewer.

South West Water, as the owner of surface water sewers, has a role to investigate misconnection problems and pollution from these assets and ensure that the issue is rectified.

If we identify a misconnection, the customer can be sent a letter:

- To request access to the property
- To request the misconnection is rectified

Find out more at southwestwater.co.uk/misconnections

Further information

Please see the box at the end for full contact details. We want to hear from you if you have any comments, complaints or compliments about the services we provide.

If you're not satisfied

Please let us know. If you have a complaint about your wastewater service, you can let us know by calling our Services Helpline, writing to us or emailing us via our website.

Consumer Council for Water (CCW)

In the unlikely event that we're not able to resolve your 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 (CCW) who'll investigate independently.

CCW is an independent statutory body which protects customers' interests and investigates complaints. You can contact them at:

Telephone: 0300 034 2222

Relay UK (NGT) is also available

Address: 1st floor
Victoria Square House
Victoria Square
Birmingham B2 4AJ
Email: via form on website
Website: ccwater.org.uk

Water Industry Redress Scheme (WATRS)

If your complaint remains unresolved after it's been through all the stages of our complaints procedure and has been reviewed by CCW, you may be eligible to take your concerns to WATRS, the Water Industry Redress Scheme, which can provide an independent, binding decision.

You can find details on how and when to apply at watrs.org or contact them at:

Telephone: 020 7520 3801
Email: info@watrs.org
Address:
WATRS
International Dispute Resolution Centre
70 Fleet Street
London
EC4Y 1EU

Ofwat

Ofwat protects the interests of customers of all water and wastewater companies in accordance with legislative provisions and Government licences. You can contact them at:

Telephone: 0121 644 7500
Address: Case Management Office, OFWAT
Centre City Tower
7 Hill Street
Birmingham B5 4UA
Email: casemanagementoffice@ofwat.gsi.gov.uk

Under the Water Industry Act 1991, certain disputes can be referred to Ofwat or an independent arbitrator for a decision. You can find further details in our [Complaints and Compliments](#) leaflet.

Where we can't reach an agreement with you in such cases, we'll inform you of your right to refer the matter to another body.

Contact us

Accounts Helpline: 0344 346 1010
8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat
Closed on Sundays and bank holidays

Services Helpline: 0344 346 2020
8am-6pm Mon-Fri
Emergencies only outside these times

There's lots of information and we can be contacted on our website
www.southwestwater.co.uk

Debt Helpline: 0800 083 0283
Water conservation: 0800 378937
Minicom: 0800 169 9965
You can contact us via Relay UK (NGT)

Address
South West Water,
PO Box 4762,
Worthing, BN11 9NT

We have Codes of Practice on:

- [Complaints and Compliments](#)
- [Our Customer Promise](#)
- [Leakage for Domestic Customers](#)
- [Our Water Supply Service](#)
- [Our Wastewater Service](#)
- [Payment and Debt Recovery](#)
- [Priority Services](#)

These codes of practice can be found on our website www.southwestwater.co.uk

We work hard to support customers in vulnerable circumstances and are proud to have received certification against the British Standard for Inclusive Service Provision.

