

A simple guide  
to water pipes,  
drains and  
sewers



# Giving you essential information

**United Utilities provides daily water and wastewater services to seven million people. From Carlisle to Crewe, Morecambe to Macclesfield, we operate one of the biggest water and wastewater systems in the world.**

Around the clock, we provide water to customers' taps – safe, wholesome and essential. We also take away and treat your wastewater – making it clean before returning it safely to the environment.

**Working for  
you 24 hours a  
day, everyday.**

This booklet is for our domestic or household customers, to answer the most common questions about water pipes, drains and sewers. It tells you where your responsibility starts and finishes and it's also a useful guide to matters such as leaks, bursts, lead pipes and sewer connections.

## **Water supply pipes**

Your property will be fed by one of two types of supply pipe:

- a separate supply pipe
- a common supply pipe

The diagrams opposite show the typical pipework arrangements for these two types of properties.

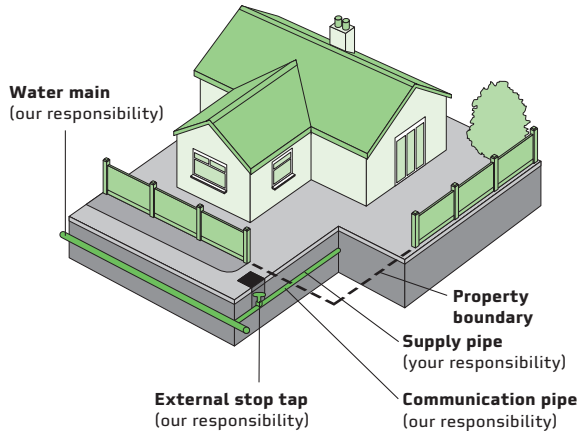
## What are we responsible for?

We have a network of 40,000 kilometres of water mains throughout the North West. We are responsible for these and for the water pipes in the street.

We are also responsible for the water pipes which run from our mains to serve individual properties, but only up to the boundary of the property where our main is situated. We call these pipes 'communication pipes'.

We are also responsible for the water meter (if you have one installed).

## Separate supply



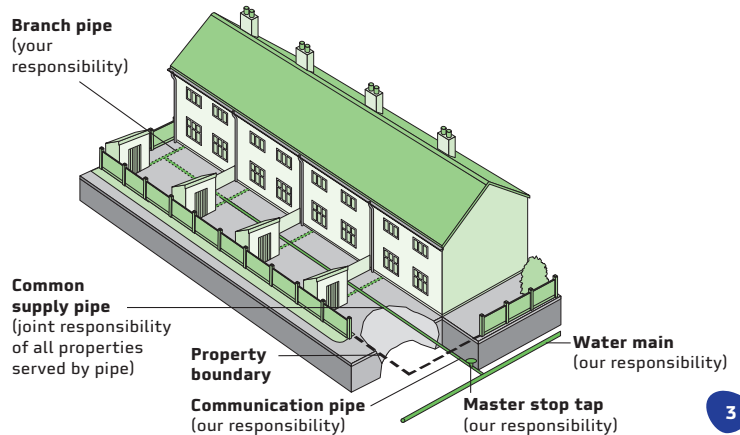
## What are you responsible for?

Once the communication pipe crosses the boundary of your property it is known as the 'water supply pipe'.

If you are a household customer, you (or your landlord) are responsible for the water supply pipe from the boundary of the property to your home.

You are also responsible for any other water pipes within the boundary of your property and for the plumbing inside your home. Common supply pipes are the joint responsibility of all the homes that are served by the pipe.

## Common supply



## Water pressure

We must supply water at a pressure which will make sure it reaches the top storey of every building, unless the building is at such a height that water will not flow to it by gravity from the service reservoir or water tower.

In simple terms our water pressure should be strong enough to fill a 4.5 litre container in 30 seconds.

Pressure and flow rates in your home can be affected by a number of factors, including:

- the height of the property above the water main in the street and its height in relation to the reservoir
- the condition of the water service pipe
- the layout of the water service pipe
- whether the property shares a water supply pipe with other properties
- peak demand conditions
- the plumbing inside your home,

If you think you have a problem with your water pressure, first check the plumbing inside your home and check that the internal stop tap is fully open. If you are still not happy, please call us on **0845 746 2200** or textphone **0808 143 0295** and we can carry out a check for you.

We have standards of service concerning water pressure which means that we have to pay compensation if the pressure in our communication pipe falls below a certain level. Full details about our compensation scheme can be found in our booklet entitled 'Our standards of service'. You can download this booklet from our website [unitedutilities.com/](http://unitedutilities.com/) leaflets or order it by calling our 24-hour automated leaflet request line on **0845 303 7711**.

## Are you concerned about lead pipes?

Lead can be harmful to health, especially for children and unborn babies. The water in our mains contains virtually no lead. However, it can dissolve tiny amounts of lead from the inside of lead supply pipes and internal plumbing.

Check your home for lead pipes. Lead pipes are dark grey (underneath any paint), soft and easily marked. Even if your plumbing has copper pipes, your supply pipe may be made of lead. Check the short length of pipe between where the supply pipe comes into the house and internal stop tap.

For further information visit [unitedutilities.com/Lead](http://unitedutilities.com/Lead) or request a 'lead in drinking water' factsheet by calling our 24-hour automated leaflet line on **0845 303 7711**.

### **Lead pipes and common supply pipes**

Older houses, especially terraces, may share a common water supply pipe, often made of lead. A common supply pipe is the joint responsibility of each property served by the pipe. But each customer is responsible for the branch pipe from the common supply to their own home or outbuilding.

### **Replacing lead pipes – how we can help**

If you think your property's internal pipework or supply pipe is made of lead, we advise you to consider replacing them. You can apply to replace your supply pipe under our lead and common supply pipe replacement scheme.

Providing that you agree to put in a new pipe to connect your property to our communication pipe, we will replace the lead communication pipe that we own free of charge. We will also connect the new supply pipe to the water main free of charge. The connection and stop tap will usually need to be at the front or side of your property. This may mean that you need to run your new pipe through the house to connect up to ours.

We produce a factsheet entitled 'Replacing lead and common supply pipes' which explains all about our scheme and how to apply. To request a copy of this factsheet please telephone our automated leaflet request line on **0845 303 7711** or via textphone on **0808 143 1195**.

**Alternatively visit [unitedutilities.com/replacingleadpipes](https://www.unitedutilities.com/replacingleadpipes) for full details.**

### Why some pipes must be replaced

In some cases we may insist on replacing a common supply pipe with separate pipes. This can happen if:

- the pipe is in such a poor state that it needs replacing
- the houses served by the pipe are converted into a larger number of flats or homes
- the shared pipe has been interfered with or is likely to be
- one of the households on the shared pipe has fallen into payment arrears.

If there is a dispute about replacing the pipe, which we cannot resolve, it can be referred to the industry regulator Ofwat for a decision.



### Is your electricity properly earthed?

The safe earthing of your home and electrical appliances is your responsibility. In the past, the lead water supply pipe was often used as an electrical earth for homes.

Removing the lead pipes may leave your home unsafe if there is an electrical fault. Please ask a qualified electrician for advice on electrical earthing.

## Arranging new connections

Plumbing in all new properties that require connection to our water mains must comply with the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999. These regulations are a set of legal standards that apply to the water industry and customers. They are designed to help protect public health and avoid wasting water and our duty to enforce them is monitored by the Drinking Water Inspectorate.

We have a duty to connect domestic properties to the mains as long as certain conditions are met. If you are moving into a new house, it is likely your builder will have made arrangements with us to provide a water connection of the right standard to the property.

There may be occasions when you want to arrange this yourself. It could be for a new building, or for an existing building where you need a water supply for the

first time. If so, we will ask you to pay a connection fee to cover all our costs including:

- the cost of making the connection to the water main
- the cost of laying our communication pipe
- a contribution to our costs in providing the overall water supply system (water infrastructure charge)
- a sewerage infrastructure charge if the property is being connected to a public sewer for the first time
- the cost of supplying and installing a meter.

We will send you a bill for infrastructure charges once the connection has been made.

Disputes about the reasonable costs of new connections can be referred to Ofwat for determination.

## Getting connected

### **If you need to be connected to our water mains network:**

You must complete an application form, which is available by calling **0845 026 4296** and asking for our 'New Development Information Pack' or by visiting our website: **[unitedutilities.com/waterconnections](https://unitedutilities.com/waterconnections)**

We will inspect the site and send you a quotation, explaining what you need to do before we make the connection. This will include:

- laying your part of the supply pipe to the required specification
- installing metering arrangements as shown in our 'New Development Information Pack'
- providing a separate supply pipe to each part of the building or premises that is separately occupied
- ensuring that the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999 are complied with.

## What if there is no existing water main?

You can ask us to provide a new main, acting on your own or with your neighbours. The new main must serve two or more properties.

### **Requesting a new main**

Those who request a new main must pay the reasonable costs of providing it, less the potential income we will earn from the main.

If we cannot agree on the amount you must pay, or the amount of any security you should provide, either of us can refer the matter to our industry regulator, Ofwat, for a decision.

## Paying for new mains

We offer a choice of two payment methods:

- annual payment over a 12 year period, secured by a bond or deposit
- payment of a deposit when you accept our estimate (this may be recalculated on completion of the work).

For more details please call 08450 264296 and ask for our 'New Development Information Pack'.

## Meeting your deadline

We will normally provide the new mains within three months of you agreeing to our terms. If we fail to meet this deadline, or any extended period that we have agreed and you suffer any loss or damage as a result, you may have a legal claim against us.

## Self lay policy

Developers have a choice whether to procure water mains and service pipes from United Utilities or appoint an accredited self-lay organisation (SLO) to carry out this work. Full details can be found on our website [unitedutilities.com/waterconnections](https://www.unitedutilities.com/waterconnections)

## Viewing water mains records

We have maps showing the position of our water mains. If you wish to see the water mains records, please call **0870 751 0101**.



## Repairing leaks

You are responsible for all the water supply pipes within the boundary of your property. However, we offer a private leak repair scheme for leaks on household water supply pipes. This means that in certain cases we may repair a leak on your supply pipe without charge. The scheme only covers the water supply pipe. It does not cover repairs to internal plumbing or to pipes underneath buildings or permanent structures. The scheme is limited to one leak investigation or repair for each private supply pipe per year. For more information visit [unitedutilities.com/bursthome](http://unitedutilities.com/bursthome) or telephone our 24-hour automated leaflets request line and order our 'Leakage Code of Practice' factsheet.

If you have a water meter and have a leak on your supply pipe, we may be able to adjust your charges for the lost water. For more information, please call our automated leaflet request line on **0845 303 7711** and ask for a 'Burst allowance claim form'.

Alternatively visit our website [unitedutilities.com/bursthome](http://unitedutilities.com/bursthome) for further information and to download the burst allowance claim form.

## Using the meter to check for leaks

If you have a meter that is at the boundary of your site, you can use it to check for a leak on your supply pipe. Turn off all taps and appliances which use water. Wait 30 minutes or so, then read the meter (including all red digits). Do not use any water for another hour and then read the meter again. If the meter reading has changed, or the counter is turning (including the last red digit) you may have a leak.

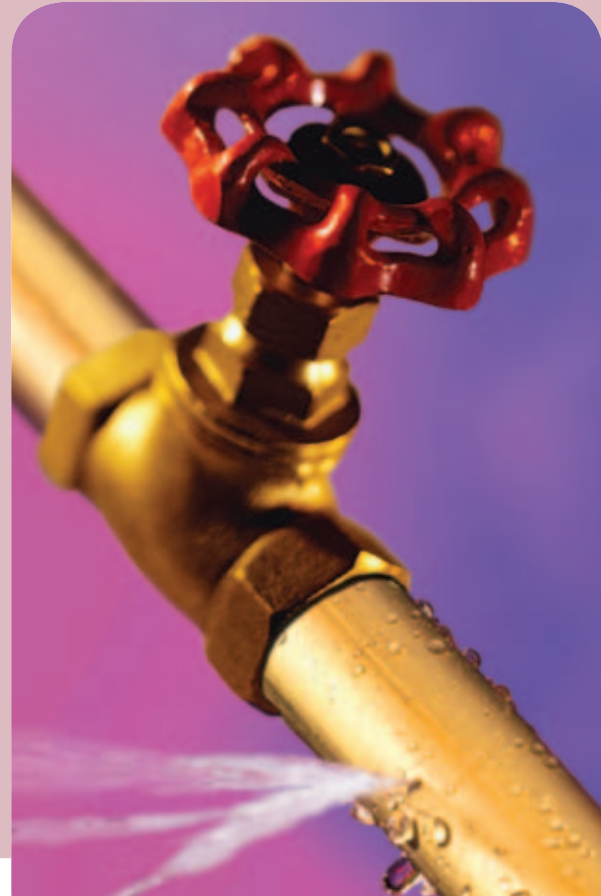
## Tracing underground pipes

If you need your underground pipework locating or tracing (within your property boundary) we recommend you engage a water industry approved plumber.

# Preventing pipe bursts

**Water pipes can freeze very quickly in cold weather. If a pipe does freeze it can split and water will leak out when it thaws again. Insulating pipes will delay freezing, but during exceptionally cold spells, it is advisable to keep your heating on low for the best protection.**

Water leaking from a burst pipe in your home can cause damage and is a waste of water. There are several steps you can take to avoid this. Insulate pipes, tanks and cisterns – pipes in draughty areas should be insulated, especially in outhouses. Tanks and cisterns in the loft should be well insulated on the top and sides, but not underneath.



**Dripping taps** – replace the washers on any dripping taps or ball valves, otherwise the overflow pipe may freeze and cause flooding. Make sure that all taps are fully turned off at night.

**Internal stop tap** – make sure you know where it is and that it is easy to turn. It should be where the water supply enters your home and is often under the kitchen sink.

**Sheds, garages and outside taps** – turn off the stop tap and any supply pipes to outbuildings during winter and drain the supply pipe if possible.

### **Thawing a frozen pipe**

If a pipe freezes but does not split, thaw it very slowly by using a hot water bottle and start to thaw it from the end nearest the tap. Never use a naked flame.

### **What to do if a pipe bursts**

- Turn off your internal stop tap.
- If this doesn't stop the leaking water then turn on all the cold water taps and drain the system as quickly as possible.
- Do not turn on any hot water taps until the central heating or immersion heater has been switched off.
- If the central heating uses solid fuel let the fire die out.
- Call a reputable plumber.

### **Going away?**

If you are going away during winter, even for just a few days, turn off the stop tap and either leave the heating on low or drain the whole system.

# Drains and sewers

**We provide a growing network of sewers and treatment works for the North West's wastewater, to safeguard public health and improve the environment.**



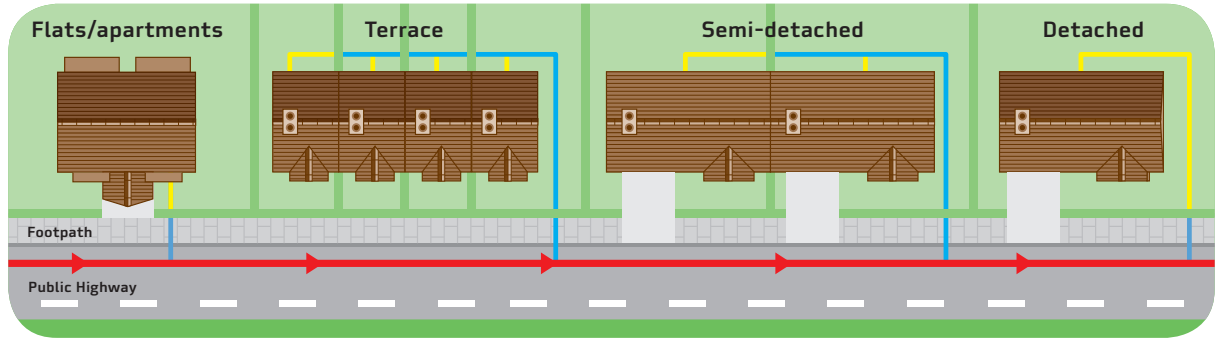
## The different types of sewers

There are three types of public sewer:

**Foul sewers** – carry wastewater away from domestic, industrial and commercial premises, usually to our treatment works.

**Surface water sewers** – carry rainfall drained from paved and roofed areas, usually to a stream, river or canal.

**Combined sewers** – carry both wastewater and surface water, usually to our treatment works. These form around 70% of the sewers in the North West.





## Your responsibility for the drains

New government legislation has changed the responsibility for the maintenance and repair of some sewer pipes which previously belonged to you (or your landlord).

Since October 1st 2011, you are responsible for the drainage pipe which serves your own property. Sewer pipes which are shared by more than one property, or run beyond your property boundary, are now our responsibility.

The diagram above provides examples of a typical sewer and drain responsibility for various property types. Further information can be found at [unitedutilities.com/privatesewers](http://unitedutilities.com/privatesewers)

## KEY

-  **Private drain**  
(responsibility of home owner)
-  Transferred to United Utilities after October 1st 2011
-  **Public sewer**  
(responsibility of United Utilities)

*Illustration provided for guidance only.*

## **Surface water drainage**

Surface water drainage is the run-off from rainwater that falls onto a customer's premises. If the surface water from your premises does not drain to a public sewer, your sewerage charges may be reduced. To apply for a reduction, please call our 24-hour automated leaflet request line on **0845 303 7711** and ask for a copy of our 'Surface water drainage for household customers' factsheet.

Alternatively visit our website [unitedutilities.com/surfacewater](http://unitedutilities.com/surfacewater) for full details.

## **New connections to our sewer system**

All domestic customers are entitled to connect their drains to our sewer system. Written approval from us is required before any new connection to a sewer is made. We need 21 calendar days notice.

We reserve the right to make the connection to our sewer, and ask you to pay the costs. We will give notice of our intention to make the connection within 14 days of receiving your completed application. We aim to start work on the connection within 21 working days of the last approval necessary for the works to be in place and 60 days to implement. In this case, Ofwat has powers to consider disputes about the costs. If we

decide to allow you or your contractor to do the work, it must be done under our supervision and at your cost. You must give us at least one working day's notice to arrange the supervision.

We can in certain circumstances refuse permission for new connections to our sewers. For example, we would not allow a foul drain to be connected to a surface water sewer. Appeals about the entitlement to connect to a public sewer can be referred to Ofwat.

## **If there is no existing sewer**

You can ask us to provide a new sewer, acting either on your own or with your neighbours. The new sewer must serve two or more properties. We will provide a new sewer and lateral drain where the financial conditions can be met.

## **Requesting a new sewer**

Customers who request a new sewer must pay the reasonable costs of providing it, less the potential income we will earn from the sewer.

If we cannot agree on the amount you must pay, or the amount of any security you should provide, either of us can refer the matter to our industry regulator, Ofwat, for a decision.



## Making the right connections

In properties where there are separate drains for wastewater and surface water, the water from your bathroom, toilet, kitchen and washing machine must go into the wastewater drain to be taken away and treated before being returned safely to the environment. The separate surface water drain collects rainwater from roofs, gutters and paths. This relatively clean water can be put back into local rivers and streams.

Wrong connections can happen when new toilets, sinks or kitchen appliances are fitted, particularly in home extensions. The pipes which take water to each of the separate drainage systems are often very close together and can be confused. Please refer to [connectright.org.uk](https://connectright.org.uk) for further advice.

Don't connect waste pipes to drains which collect rainwater from your roof or paths. Do check with us if you are in any doubt about proposed or existing drains.

Do check that you are not building over a public sewer if you are extending your property. Do use a qualified plumber, or if you do the work yourself, make sure you know exactly what is needed. If you connect to the wrong drain you will be responsible for putting this right. Failure to do so could lead to prosecution and a fine of up to £2,500.

We aim to make our sewers big enough to protect homes against flooding. However, the weather always creates a risk, so we plan to protect your home against flooding from all but the most severe storms, that is, storms that occur once in 30 years. Flooding from sewers can arise for other reasons, for example blockages. If there is a sewer blockage or a breakdown at our pumping station which disrupts service or threatens to flood inside domestic properties, we will have one of our representatives on site as quickly as possible but normally within 4 hours.

### Keeping drains and sewers healthy

Many things are flushed down the toilet or poured down the drain which can upset the treatment process or cause the sewer system to block, causing wastewater to overflow or flood into your home.

#### Help us to reduce flooding instances by following this useful advice

- Don't flush disposable razors, cotton buds, nappies or personal items like condoms or sanitary towels down the toilet – put them in the bin.
- Don't push kitchen waste down the sink – put it in the bin, or collect vegetable peelings and tea bags for the compost heap.
- Don't pour waste cooking oils and hot fats down the sink – let the oil cool and put it in the bin, or collect it in a container and mix with nuts and breadcrumbs to make a tasty treat for garden birds.
- Don't pour used engine oil down the drain – collect it in a container and take it to your local recycling centre. Illegal discharges risk prosecution with a fine of up to £5,000.



For further information on how to avoid blockages visit:  
[unitedutilities.com/whatsnottoflush](https://www.unitedutilities.com/whatsnottoflush)

For more information about your drains or connections to our sewer network, call us on 0845 602 0406

## Your right to be treated fairly

If you have any complaints about the way we have dealt with you, you should contact us. Call **0845 303 7711** or textphone **0808 143 1195** for a copy of our leaflet 'Our complaints procedure'.

The Consumer Council for Water is an independent body which represents customers' interests and investigates complaints. You can contact them at:

Consumer Council for Water Northern  
Suite 902  
9th Floor  
Bridgewater House  
Whitworth Street  
Manchester  
M1 6LT

Tel: 0845 705 6316  
0161 236 6112

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

Some unresolved matters, including those concerning metering and compensation, may be referred to an independent arbitrator, chosen by agreement between us or by our regulators if we cannot agree.

## Other leaflets that may be of interest:

- Our standards of service
- Could you pay less with a water meter?
- Testing household water meters
- A simple guide to paying your water bill
- Extracare
- A guide to using water wisely
- Watersure
- Our complaints procedure
- Replacing lead and common supply pipes

All our leaflets are available to download from our website: [unitedutilities.com/leaflets](http://unitedutilities.com/leaflets). Alternatively, please call our 24-hour automated leaflet request line on **0845 303 7711** or textphone **0808 143 1195**, or write to: United Utilities (Dept LR), 1050 Europa Boulevard, Warrington WA55 1LR.

## All our booklets are available in large print, Braille and on audio cassette.

If English is not your main language, we may be able to help you. We translate all our key service booklets into: Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Chinese, Bengali and Punjabi. Please call us on **0845 746 1100** or textphone **0808 143 1195** to request a copy.

## Your bill

To discuss your bill call **0845 746 1100** (if you don't have a water meter) or **0845 746 2222** (if you have a water meter) or textphone **0808 143 1195**. Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm, Saturday 8am to 5pm.

**Or write to:** United Utilities, PO Box 459, Warrington, WA55 1WB.

## Your water and wastewater services

To report problems with your water or wastewater services call **0845 746 2200** or textphone **0808 143 0295**. Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm, Saturday 8am to 6pm, Sunday 8am to 12 noon. Emergency service out of hours.

**Or write to:** United Utilities, PO Box 453, Warrington, WA55 1SE.

[unitedutilities.com](http://unitedutilities.com)

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Lingley Mere Business Park  
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DELIVERING TODAY,  
BUILDING FOR TOMORROW