

# Your questions answered

## Fitting the water meter

### How do I apply to have a meter fitted?

Apply on-line at [unitedutilities.com/meters](http://unitedutilities.com/meters) or complete the enclosed application form. Alternatively you can also apply by calling us on **0845 303 7744**.

### Where will the meter be fitted?

**We will fit a water meter free of charge inside your home.**

Our preference is to fit the meter inside your property (on the water supply pipe, which is the pipe which brings water into your home).

An approved United Utilities contractor will carry out a survey and decide on the most suitable place for the meter.

Please note that the location of the meter is at the discretion of United Utilities and in some cases we will need to make a second visit to fit your meter. You will need to give us access to the incoming water supply pipe to allow us to install the meter. This may require the removal of any obstruction to the pipework (eg wood panelling, white goods etc) to ensure a successful installation.

Wherever possible, we can offer **minor** joinery work to accommodate your installation. This will be carried out by our contractor and they will ensure that you are aware of any changes and obtain your approval before the work is carried out.

### Can I pay to have the meter fitted elsewhere?

Yes. If it is possible for us to install the meter in our preferred location (inside), but you would prefer the meter to be located in the footpath, we will first assess whether it is possible. Some properties cannot be metered externally, see next section for full details. If we are able to install the meter in the footpath for you, you will need to pay any difference in cost, which is usually around £100 plus VAT.

### Can you always fit a meter?

No, not always. For a small number of properties it is not possible to fit a meter at all. Here are the most common reasons for not being able to fit a meter.

- You live in a flat and have access to communal facilities such as a laundry room or a shared hot water supply.
- You have more than one supply of water to your property.
- You share your water supply with other properties.
- The pipework inside your property is inaccessible, in poor condition or does not comply with the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999.

- We are unable to find a suitable place to fit the meter in either
  - the footpath or public highway outside your property
  - inside your home.

If we are unable to fit a meter at your property you can choose to pay your water and wastewater services based on Assessed Charges instead of based on the rateable value of your property. Assessed Charges are a fixed amount per year. The amount you pay depends on your property type, unless you live alone, in which case you may be eligible for our Single Person Household Tariff.

The property based charge is split into 3 categories:

- Detached (including houses, link detached and detached bungalows);
- Semi-detached (including houses and semi detached bungalows);
- Other household premises (including flats and terraced houses).

The Single Person Household Tariff only applies if you live alone. It is only intended for customers who permanently live alone and therefore if you are a single parent and have a child or children living with you, even on a part-time basis, you will not be eligible for this tariff.

We will discuss the above options with you if we can't fit a meter at your property.

**Please be aware that if we are able to fit the meter, but you decide not to go ahead with this, you will not be eligible for either an assessed charge or single person household tariff shown above.**

**These options can only be offered in those instances when we are unable to fit the meter.**

### When will you read the meter?

We will usually read the meter every six months. If the meter is inside we will normally be able to obtain a meter reading remotely without having to enter the property. However, there may be occasion(s) in the future when we need to gain access to visually inspect the meter. If the meter is located outside we should not require access to your property.

If we have, for any reason, been unable to read the meter, we will leave a card advising you what to do next. You can call us with your reading on **0845 746 2222** or textphone **0808 143 1195**, or enter your reading on-line at [unitedutilities.com/meter-reading](http://unitedutilities.com/meter-reading). An actual reading, taken either by you or by our meter reader will make sure you receive an accurate bill.

It is a requirement from our regulator Ofwat that we bill you for services based on your own meter read or a read taken by us at least once a year.

It is also a regulatory requirement that United Utilities takes a reading at least once every two years.

We must be allowed access to your meter at all times for any maintenance and exchange. It is an offence to block or prevent access to the meter.

### **How long will it take to fit the meter?**

If the survey shows that we are able to fit a meter, we will do so within **three months** of receiving your fully completed application form. We will write to you within two weeks of receiving your form to confirm that our contractor will come to survey your property.

Our contractors will then contact you to arrange a convenient appointment. They will contact you by phone if you have provided a contact number, or by letter.

**However, please bear in mind it may take several weeks before they contact you to arrange the appointment.**

In the unlikely event that we take longer than three months to fit the meter, we will normally credit your account with £4 for every full week after we fail to meet our standard. There are some circumstances when you may not be entitled to this allowance.

These include:

- If you haven't filled in your application form correctly resulting in us having to delay fitting the meter.
- If we make an appointment with you to fit the meter and you miss or cancel that appointment. This could also affect your compensation payments.
- If you fail to carry out any necessary alterations to your pipework (we will let you know if alterations are required at the time of the survey). If you fail to carry out these alterations within 3 months, then your original request will be cancelled and you will have to re-apply for a meter.
- If you ask us to delay fitting the meter beyond the three months.

### **Can I pay you to fit my meter sooner?**

No, this isn't possible. We need to make sure that we treat all our customers the same. This means that you cannot pay for or contribute towards having a meter fitted sooner.

### **I'm a tenant, can I apply to have a meter fitted?**

Yes, unless you have a fixed term tenancy agreement of less than 6 months in which case you must obtain your landlord's permission before applying for a meter.

### **I'm a landlord, can I apply to have a meter fitted at one of my properties?**

You can only ask us to fit a meter if your name is on the water bill. Please make sure you tell your tenants that you want to have a meter fitted at the property.

### **Can I change my mind after the meter has been fitted?**

Yes. You have 13 months after the meter has been fitted to give us written notice that you want to change back to the way we used to charge you for water services.

The meter must stay in place at your property but all your future bills will be based on the rateable value of your property, as before. If you do not tell us within this time period, you will automatically continue to pay charges based on your meter readings.

However, you must continue to pay charges on meter readings in the following circumstances:

- you water your garden using an unattended device e.g. sprinkler
- you fill a pond or swimming pool (over 10,000 litres) automatically
- you have a bath with a capacity over 230 litres
- you have a power shower unit
- you have a water softener which uses reverse osmosis
- your property is a house and business and the main water usage is for the business

## **Your bill**

### **How often will you send me a bill?**

You will receive a bill every six months. This is for water and wastewater services you have already used. The date you receive your bill depends on when we read the meter.

Your first metered bill could arrive at any time up to six months after the meter has been fitted. If we have been unable to get either our own reading or a reading from you, we will send you an estimated bill.

### **How can I pay my bill?**

We offer a range of flexible ways for you to pay your bill. You can pay by Direct Debit, cash or cheque. Some customers prefer to pay each bill as it arrives, but most prefer to spread the cost over the year by choosing a budget payment scheme. We estimate how much water you will use in a year and divide the total into regular monthly payments (the most popular way to pay is by Direct Debit). The following year we will adjust the amount you pay (up or down) based on how much water you are actually using.

### **Can I pay by Direct Debit?**

Yes. Direct Debit takes the hassle out of paying your water bill and you can spread your payments. We'll also give you £5 off your bill each year. Simply call us on **0845 303 7744** or textphone **0808 143 1195**.

### **I currently pay by Direct Debit. Do I have to fill in another form?**

No, you don't have to do anything. We will continue with your arrangement unless you tell us otherwise.

### **What happens to my 'old' bill after the meter has been fitted?**

Regardless of how you currently pay, please make sure you keep paying your bill until we fit the meter.

Once the meter has been fitted, we will finalise your 'old' bill and if we owe you any money, we will reduce your first metered bill by this amount. This will show as a credit balance. If you owe us money on your 'old' bill we will send you an account for the outstanding balance.

## **Other questions**

### **Will fitting a meter affect the electrical earthing in my property?**

If we fit the meter inside your home, nothing we do will change the continuity of the earthing or bonding of your electrical system. We will fit a permanent bonding cable around the meter and this must stay in place.

If we have fitted the meter outside your property and your electrical system used the water service pipe as an earth, there may be some effect. You have responsibility for the correct electrical earthing of your property. If you are concerned about this please contact a qualified electrician.

### **Will fitting a meter affect the water pressure in my home?**

You are unlikely to have any water pressure problems after fitting the meter, but we will check that the water supply has been properly restored.

### **What happens if my water supply pipe leaks?**

We have a private leak repair scheme for household customers. This means that in certain cases we may repair a leak on your supply pipe without charge. We will only repair any leaks on the pipework between the property boundary and the outside wall of your property but not under buildings or on internal plumbing. To report leaks on the road, footpath or in the garden, call free on **0800 33 00 33**.

We recommend you take regular meter readings to make sure there are no leaks on your private pipework. For more information on leakage, call our automated leaflet request line on **0845 303 7711** or textphone **0808 143 1195** and ask for our 'Leakage code of practice'.

If we find a leak on the incoming pipework when we fit a meter, which we can repair without any extra digging, we will repair the leak without charge.

### **Will I have to pay for water wasted because of a leak or burst?**

When you have a meter, we charge you for all the water that passes through it. However, if you discover a leak on your external supply pipe we may be able to give you an allowance to cover some or all of the water lost.

We will refund the cost of any water lost from the leak, provided that this is the first burst that has occurred and it is repaired within two weeks of discovering it. We may also give an allowance against your wastewater charges. After this, you will be charged for any further water lost because of a leak. You must continue to pay your account as normal while your claim is being considered.

You are responsible for maintaining all pipework within the boundary of your property whether you have a meter or not.

### **Who owns the meter?**

United Utilities owns the meter. We are responsible for maintaining, repairing and eventually replacing it.

### **What happens to the meter if I go back to charges based on the rateable value of my property?**

We will leave the meter where it is. It is important that it is not altered, damaged or removed in any way. The meter must remain easily accessible for maintenance and future reading.

### **If I move house can the new occupier go back to charges based on the rateable value of the property?**

No, this is not an option. All new occupants will be charged for their water services based on their meter readings (even if you have changed back to paying charges based on rateable value).

When moving home you must let the new owner know they will be charged for their water services based on meter readings.

### **Can I remove the meter?**

No. It is illegal to tamper with or remove a water meter. If you remove the meter, we will have to replace it at your cost and you may also be prosecuted.

## **Your rights and responsibilities**

This section tells you about your legal rights and responsibilities in relation to your water and wastewater services charges. It covers issues such as leaks, moving premises, supply pipes and the water meter itself.

The occupier of premises is liable for charges except where another person has agreed with the Company to accept responsibility, in which case that person is liable.

In most landlord and tenant situations it is normally the tenant who is charged as the occupier and not the landlord. The main exceptions include the case of holiday lets, bedsits, student accommodation or other short term accommodation where the occupation of the tenants is transient. In such cases the landlord will be treated as being in occupation.

Charges will be made wherever premises are occupied or furnished. If premises are not occupied or furnished, the Company will make charges for any services provided to the person receiving those services.

Unless we have reached another agreement with you, charges are payable when you receive your bill; and we must receive your payment within 14 days.

We will charge you for all the water which has passed through the meter regardless of any loss, wastage, leakage or misuse. However, the first time there is a burst on your supply, we may give you an allowance.

This is to cover both water and wastewater charges. You must have repaired the leak within any time limit we set; or at least within two weeks. Our 'Leakage code of practice' for metered domestic properties gives you more information. You can get a copy by calling us on **0845 746 2222** or textphone number **0808 143 1195**.

If, for any reason, we cannot establish how much water has passed through the meter, we will estimate the amount of water used to base your charges on. If appropriate, we will adjust this charge later. For any period of time when the meter is out of order, our estimate will be based on the most reliable information available.

A consumer with a measured water supply is liable for water services charges until either:

- (i) he ceases to occupy the premises (or no longer requires a supply of water to them) and has given the Company at least two working days notice to that effect; or
- (ii) where a meter supplies several separately occupied premises the person who has accepted responsibility for payment of charges gives a reasonable period of notice to terminate that arrangement.

In the case of (i) failure to give such notice will result in these charges being payable until the next normal meter reading date except as provided by section 144 of the Act.

You are responsible for the water supply pipe serving your property. This is usually the section of pipe from the boundary of your property (often the garden wall) into your property. In some cases, particularly in rural areas, you may be responsible for more pipework between the part of the street in which our main is laid and your property or where the supply pipe crosses someone else's land. If you are in any doubt about your responsibility, more information may be available from the deeds of your property.

The meter remains our property. This means that we are responsible for maintaining and eventually replacing it. We will do this at our own expense, unless the meter has been tampered with.

**Tampering with a meter is a serious offence. You should not remove the meter, obstruct access to it or carry out any work on it without our permission. We will recover the costs of any expense, loss or damage from the person responsible.**

Occasionally we may need to test your meter, or if you ask us to, we must test it. If you have asked us to test the meter and it is not faulty, you must pay for the test. For more information, call our automated leaflet request line and ask for our factsheet 'Testing household water meters', on **0845 303 7711** or textphone **0808 143 1195**.

You also have the option of having the meter tested by the Trading Standards Officer. If you wish to do this, you should contact your local Trading Standards Department directly.

## Do you need a little ExtraCare?

ExtraCare is the name we give to a range of FREE services that we offer to our water customers with extra needs. Our services include:

- a password scheme, to protect you against bogus callers
- personal notification of water shut-offs
- large print, Braille and talking bills

Our ExtraCare services are ideal for customers who:

- are older
- have a disability
- have a serious illness
- have sight, hearing or learning difficulties

To register as an ExtraCare customer telephone us on **0845 746 1100**. Alternatively register online at **[unitedutilities.com/extracare](http://unitedutilities.com/extracare)**

## Booklets in other languages

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 phone us on **0845 746 1100** or textphone **0808 143 1195** to request a copy.

Other leaflets that may be of interest:

- A guide to using water wisely
- A simple guide to pipes, drains and sewers
- A simple guide to paying your water bill
- Our standards of service
- Our WaterSure scheme

All our leaflets are available to download at **[unitedutilities.com/leaflets](http://unitedutilities.com/leaflets)** or by calling our 24-hour automated request line on **0845 303 7711**, textphone **0808 143 1195**.

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

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