

How to check your water usage (...and spot those sneaky leaks)

Use it, don't lose it

Leaks can be sneaky things. They're often hidden from view - on a pipe behind a plastered wall, on a water tank tucked away in the attic, or even on an outside pipe under your garden.

And, if you've got one, you could well be pouring money down the drain.

Your leak doesn't even have to be that sneaky, it may just be a dripping tap or a leaky showerhead. But dripping 24 hours a day...drip, drip,drip...can make the bills add up.

So, if your water bills are suddenly a lot higher than normal, a leak could be the reason.

Thankfully, there are some simple ways to check for leaks which don't require you to be a DIY god or goddess!

You just need a bit of patience and a spare couple of hours.

So put the kettle on, and let's play leak detective.

This leaflet explains how to check for leaks in five easy steps – and what to do if you find one.

Step 1: Reality check

Before you start looking for leaks, it's worth a quick reality check. Have you really got a leak, or are you simply using more water than you think?

Remember, with a water meter, every drop counts.

If you've installed a thirsty new household appliance recently, such as a power shower, have been giving the hosepipe or sprinkler a regular workout, or have taken to throwing regular pool parties for your neighbours, this could easily cause a spike in your water usage – and your bill. Also, if you've had a new addition to the family recently this can also result in more water being used in the household.

**Still convinced you've got a leak?
Then let's move on to Step 2 overleaf.**



Did you know...

You can also check your water usage online

We have a great tool on our website which will give you an indication of what your bill should be, based on how much water you use in the home and garden. Visit [unitedutilities.com/meters](https://www.unitedutilities.com/meters) to give it a try – you may find that you are using more water than you thought, and your water charges are correct.

For further information



[unitedutilities.com/meters](https://www.unitedutilities.com/meters)



0345 672 2999

Opening hours:

8am - 8pm Mon to Fri;

8am - 4pm Sat



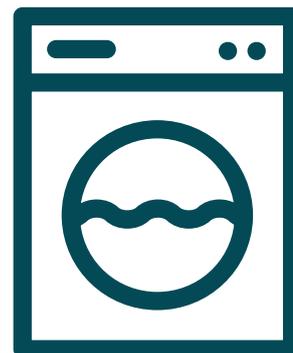
United Utilities
PO Box 459
Warrington
WA55 1WB

Step 2: Check for those not-so-sneaky leaks

Have a quick check around your home to see if you can spot obvious signs of leaks or drips. Here's what to look out for:

- **Dripping taps:** it may look innocent, but a dripping tap can waste thousands of litres of water a year. Don't let your cash disappear down the plughole.
- **Poorly plumbed appliances:** have a look behind your dishwasher and washing machine. Any obvious signs of a leak?
- **Overflows from a water tank or cistern in the loft:** have a look to see if any water has been dripping out of your overflow pipes down the brickwork of your home.
- **Toilet cisterns:** new toilet cisterns tend to overflow into the toilet bowl rather than traditional cisterns which overflow outside. Therefore, they are not always easy to spot and can waste an incredible amount of water.

As a guide, if your drip can fill a milk bottle in 5 minutes, then its wasting nearly 60,000 litres of water a year - and costing you over £170.00 as well. Drip...drip...drip.



Step 3: Check the meter

OK, you're certain you've not been overdoing your water usage, and you've still got that nagging feeling that a rogue pipe is the culprit.

The next step is to check your meter.

Now where is that water meter again? You'll find it either:

Inside: it's normally fitted close to your internal stop tap, which in many homes is under the kitchen sink, in the downstairs loo, on in your garage.

Outside: usually near the boundary of your home, such as in the front garden, your drive or in the footpath. You may need a screwdriver to lift the outer lid.

You can also sometimes find it in a wall-mounted box on the side of your home.

Found it? Now here's what to do:

- **Turn off all taps and appliances which use water.**
- **Wait 30 minutes to allow any tanks and cisterns to fill up, then take a meter reading (including the first two red digits).**
- **Don't use any water for at least one hour, then take another meter reading. Ideally, the longer you can wait between the two meter reads the better (for example, overnight), as some leaks are very small and it takes a longer period of time for the meter to record the water being wasted.**
- **Compare the two readings especially the reds. Have they changed? If so, you could have a sneaky leak.**

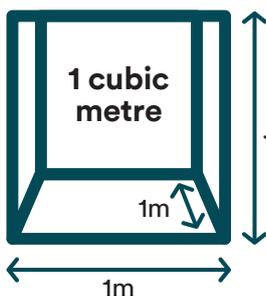
Still think you have a leak? Go to Step 4.

How we calculate your bill

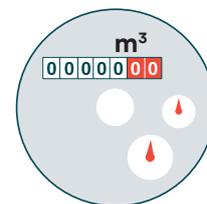
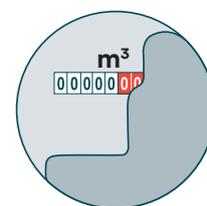
As you have a water meter installed in your home, your bill is based on your meter reading. We only use the black digits when working out your bill, as they tell us how many cubic metres of water you have used (a cubic metre is 1,000 litres of water). The red digits (and dials) are parts of a cubic metre which are not used for billing purposes.

Our cost for 1,000 litres of water is less than £3 - and this includes delivering the water to your home and taking away all the used water too.

1 cubic metre of water provides enough for:



- 13 baths;
- or 14 washing machine loads;
- or 28 showers;
- or 33 dishwasher loads;
- or 111 toilet flushes.



Your meter will look like one of these diagrams above - remember to read both the black and red digits and dials when testing for leaks.

Did you know?

- Every water meter has a unique serial number. Make sure your meter's serial number matches the serial number on your bill.
- You can do your water meter test at night, if you prefer. Take a reading before going to bed, and another one when you wake up in the morning (before you use the loo or shower, of course).

Step 4: Hunt that leak down

So, your meter is turning even when you're not using any water. This could indicate a leak.

What should you do next?

Before calling a plumber, have another look around your house for any obvious signs of a leak. If you have an outside tap, don't forget to give that a quick check over too.

Found the leak? It's time to call a plumber.

Not spotted anything obvious? Go to Step 5.



Step 5: Check your water supply pipe

If your water meter is located outside, the leak could be on your external supply pipe.

This is the pipe that connects your home to the public water mains, and brings all that lovely water flowing into your home every day.

It will run under your garden, path or driveway. You may not know it, but you actually own this pipe and are legally responsible for it.

To check if your supply pipe is leaking, turn off your internal stop tap so that no water reaches your taps or inside pipes. Now check your meter again. Is it still turning? If so, the leak could well be on your supply pipe.

This may be better news than it sounds, because we might be able to fix the pipe for you, and even cover the cost of the water that has been seeping away.

No evidence of a leak on the supply pipe?

Did you know?

You can usually find your internal stop tap under the sink, or in a cellar or garage. It's normally where the water supply pipe first enters your property.

If you have found a leak:

How we can help

If you've found a leak, we may be able to help – depending on where it's located. We can also usually make a one-off refund for the cost of the water that has been lost.

External leaks: If the leak is on your external supply pipe, we may be able to repair it, free of charge.

However, if your pipe runs under your house, conservatory or other permanent structure, we may not be able to do the repair. We don't mind doing some digging in your garden or driveway, but have to draw the line at tunnelling beneath your property. Visit our website unitedutilities.com/bursthome for full details.

Call us on **0345 672 3723** to arrange an appointment with our engineers.

Internal leaks: if your leak is on your home plumbing, such as your toilet cistern, water pipes, central heating pipes or is a dripping tap, unfortunately, we're not able to help. This is a job for a private plumber. However, we may be able to help with the cost of the water lost during the time you had the leak. Visit unitedutilities.com/bursthome for details.

Remember to check your household insurance policy, to see if you are covered for the cost of the repair.

If you have not found a leak:

And finally...the meter test

If, after carrying out the steps in this leaflet, you don't feel a leak is the reason for your bills being higher than normal, you may wish to consider having your meter tested.

It's very rare for a meter to fail a test, but if it does, you'll be refunded the money you are owed, and a new water meter will be installed. You won't be charged for the test.

If the meter passes, you'll have to pay for the cost of the test and the bill amount will still be due. So it's really worth carrying out the tests we've explained in this factsheet before you decide to have your meter tested.

Visit unitedutilities.com/meters to download the meter test application form.

About us

United Utilities is the North West's water company. We keep the taps flowing and toilets flushing for seven million customers every day. From Crewe to Carlisle, we work hard behind the scenes to help your life flow smoothly.

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