

# Trade effluent explained

Your guide to discharging trade effluent in United Utilities' region



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# Introduction

United Utilities is responsible for delivering water and wastewater services in the North West of England. Our purpose is to provide great water for a stronger, greener and healthier North West.

Through the retail:wholesale framework, we serve 200,000 business customers, supplying great water to taps and taking away wastewater, via our network of sewers, to be cleaned and treated before returning it safely to the environment.

Through their business operations, many of these organisations produce liquid waste, or effluent, from their manufacturing processes. Making sure that the volume and strength of this effluent does not cause a risk to people, the sewer network, treatment processes or the environment is managed through our Trade Effluent team.



## So what is trade effluent?

Trade effluent is any liquid waste that is discharged into the sewer network from a business or industrial process on trade premises.

We have a duty to manage thousands of trade effluent consents across the North West, covering a wide range of industries, from car washes and laundries to food production and the manufacture of pharmaceuticals.

Managing trade effluent responsibly is essential for protecting the environment, maintaining public health, and ensuring the integrity of the sewer system. Even small discharges of just a few litres of effluent per day may require consent which is why it's important for businesses to understand their responsibilities.

This leaflet provides practical guidance on how trade effluent is regulated and the steps you need to take to comply with legal requirements.

Whether you're new to trade effluent or looking to update your existing consent, this leaflet outlines everything from application procedures and monitoring requirements to pollution prevention and what to do in the event of a spillage. By following these guidelines, you can help safeguard the water quality in your local area and avoid financial penalties.

### Top five sources of trade effluent in the North West

34%

Vehicle washing

13%

Food and drinks manufacture

7%

Laundry services

6%

Engineering

4%

Chemical industry



We serve **200,000** business customers



We monitor **3,000** trade effluent discharges



We treat **200 million litres** of trade effluent every day

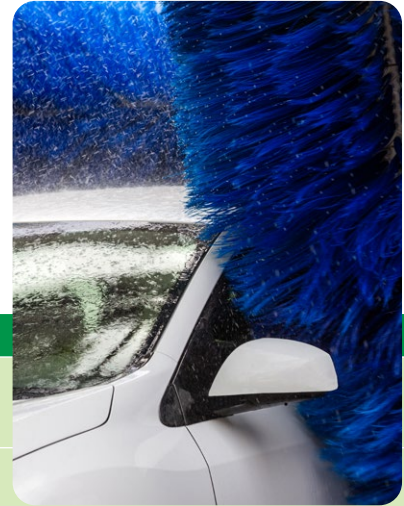









We analyse **10,000** samples of trade effluent discharges every year

## Types of trade effluent

Trade effluent can vary widely depending on the type of business and its processes.

Here are some common types of trade effluent.



Type of business	Trade effluent composition
 <b>Laundry</b>	Contains detergent, oils and dirt
 <b>Car wash</b>	Contains detergent, oils and dirt
 <b>Sites using cooling waters</b>	Water used in industrial cooling processes which may contain additives
 <b>Food processing/ manufacturing</b>	Effluent from food production and packaging facilities, which can include organic matter, fats, oils and grease
 <b>Engineering</b>	Manufacturing plants, which may contain oils, greases, chemicals, heavy metals
 <b>Pharmaceutical</b>	Wastewater from drug manufacturing plants, which may contain active pharmaceutical ingredients and other chemicals
 <b>Metal finishing</b>	Effluent from metal plating and finishing operations, which can include heavy metals and acids

However, not all liquid waste is considered trade effluent. Here are some examples of what is not classified as effluent.



Type of liquid waste	Composition
 <b>Domestic sewage or wastewater</b>	From toilets, showers and sinks in homes, shops and offices
 <b>Rainwater</b>	Uncontaminated rainwater run-off from roofs and small areas of hard standing
 <b>Uncontaminated surface water</b>	Rainwater collected from roads and parking areas that has been through a properly maintained oil separator
 <b>Wastewater from domestic activities</b>	Effluent from food preparation or laundry facilities in retail premises such as pubs, high street shops, cafes, hotels, or residential care homes



**If your business discharges trade effluent you must apply for a consent through your retailer, who will liaise with us on your behalf.**



## Why control trade effluent?

We need to monitor and control the effluent which enters the sewer network to ensure no substances that may cause harm to people, the sewer network, treatment processes and the environment are discharged.

Trade effluent is highly variable in strength and volume and so we put in place controls to reduce these risks.



## What is a trade effluent consent?

Under the regulations of the Water Industry Act 1991, water companies are required to issue businesses with trade effluent consents. A consent is a legal document that we issue to give a business permission to discharge trade effluent into the public sewer system. The consent outlines the conditions covering the quality and quantity of discharge that is permitted to enter the sewer network.

Here are some examples of common conditions that may be included in a consent with specific limits. It is an offence to discharge trade effluent without consent and doing so may lead to prosecution.

Condition	Why is the condition included?
Daily volume and flow rate	To prevent flooding or pollution from sewer overflows into local waterways
pH scale	A measure of acidity / alkalinity to ensure the sewers and treatment works continue to process the effluent without any adverse impact
Temperature	To ensure the safety of our employees working in the sewers
Chemical oxygen demand	A measure to control organic load to ensure that the processes at our treatment works are not adversely impacted
Suspended solids	To prevent siltation and blockages in the sewer system that can cause an interruption of service to customers
Sulphate / Sulphide	To prevent damage to sewers and control odours
Ammonia	To prevent unsafe conditions for employees working in the sewers. It also can cause pollution which is harmful to the environment (eutrophication)
Phosphorus	Can be harmful to the environment (eutrophication)
Fats, oil and grease	To prevent blockages in the sewer
Hazardous substances	Some chemicals are toxic to people, the wastewater treatment process and the environment

## How do I apply for a trade effluent consent?

- 1 Contact your retailer**

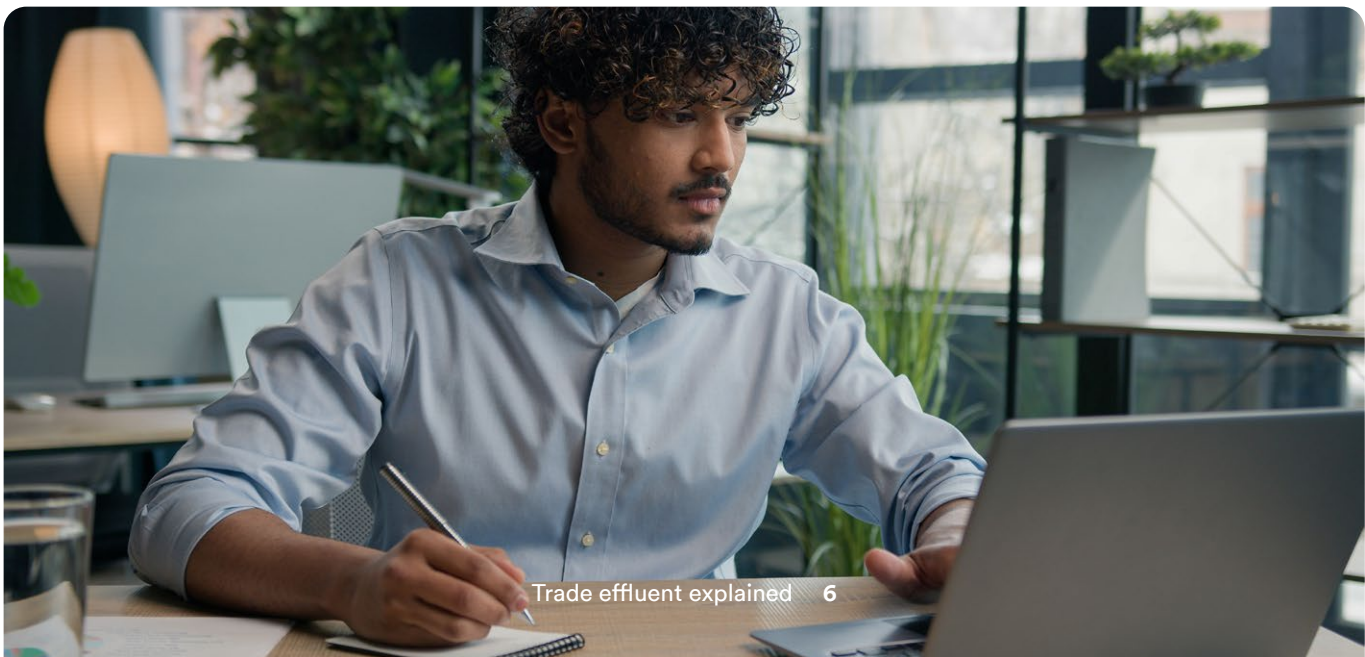
You should have a retailer that provides water and wastewater services to your business. Your retailer will assist you with the application process for trade effluent consent, including completing the necessary forms and submitting them to us. If you do not have a retailer, you can find a list of approved retailers on the Open Water website. Contact details are found at the end of this leaflet.
- 2 Complete application form**

Please provide details about your business and the nature of the effluent. Provide a drainage plan of your site showing the flow routes of trade effluent, surface water and domestic wastewater. The location of the proposed sampling point and connection to the public sewer should be clearly identified.
- 3 United Utilities assessment**

We will assess your application and may conduct site visits or ask for more information.
- 4 Approval**

Once approved, you will receive a consent document outlining the conditions under which your business is permitted to discharge liquid waste into the sewer network. A copy will be available on our public register, which is on our website. Once trade effluent is discharged into the sewer network, we will visit the site regularly to monitor the effluent.
- 5 Refusal**

If you're unhappy with the conditions of the consent, the time it has taken us to process it, or our refusal to give you consent, please contact your retailer who will contact us on your behalf. We will endeavour to resolve the problem. However, if we can't resolve the problem, you can contact Ofwat regarding the appeals process. Contact details are found at the end of this leaflet.



## What happens if I fail to comply with the conditions of consent?

At United Utilities, we're committed to protecting public health, the environment, and the operation of our water and wastewater services.

To fulfil this commitment, there are times when we need to take enforcement action when a business hasn't complied with the consent conditions.

**We believe prevention is better than cure. That's why we:**

- Offer advice and support to help you stay compliant
- Encourage best practices in your day-to-day operations
- Aim to work with you before taking formal action

**However, we will act if you've breached the conditions of your consent or there's been an illegal or harmful discharge into the sewer system.**



### We may prosecute if

- There's been serious harm or risk
- You've ignored previous warnings or failed to act
- You've obstructed our staff or provided false information



### Key principles when enforcing the consent

- **Proportionality** Our response matches the seriousness of the issue
- **Consistency** We treat similar situations in a similar way
- **Transparency** We explain clearly what's wrong and what needs to be done
- **Accountability** We're open about our decisions and actions
- **Targeting** We focus on the biggest risks and repeat issues



### Alternatives to prosecution

If prosecution isn't appropriate, we may issue:

- **Caution** – a formal written admission of the offence
- **Formal warning** – a written notice that an offence has occurred



### Penalties can include

- Recovery of our investigation and legal costs
- Fines (unlimited in serious cases)
- Imprisonment (for the most serious offences)

Our detailed enforcement policy is available on our website:  
[unitedutilities.com/Business-services/trade-effluent/trade-effluent-faqs/](https://www.unitedutilities.com/Business-services/trade-effluent/trade-effluent-faqs/)



# How is trade effluent monitored?

To effectively monitor and enforce compliance, we have a team of regulatory controllers working across the North West who have the authority to:

- **Access premises:** Enter your business premises at reasonable times without notice to inspect the trade effluent discharge and related facilities
- **Inspect records:** Review records and documents related to the monitoring and management of trade effluent
- **Take samples:** Collect samples of the trade effluent for analysis to ensure compliance with consent conditions
- **Conduct tests:** Perform tests and measurements on-site to assess the quality and quantity of the effluent



## What are the charges for discharging effluent?

Your retailer will be able to provide information on your trade effluent charges. Charges can vary based on several factors. Here are the main components that typically make up trade effluent charges:

**Volume charge:** This is based on the volume of trade effluent discharged into the sewer system. The more effluent you discharge, the higher the charge.

**Strength charge:** This charge depends on the strength of the effluent, determined by the effluent's chemical oxygen demand and suspended solids concentration. Higher concentrations of pollutants will result in higher charges.

**Application charges:** These are standard charges that cover administrative costs, such as processing your consent application.

**Non-compliance charges:** If your effluent does not meet the consent conditions, you may incur additional charges or fines.

## Can I apply for allowances for water not returned to sewer?

**Eligibility:** If a significant portion of the water you use is incorporated into products or lost through evaporation, you may be eligible for an allowance.

**Application process:** Contact your retailer to apply for the allowance. You will need to provide detailed information about your water usage and how much is used in products or lost through evaporation.

**Assessment:** We will assess your application, which may include site visits and reviewing your water usage records. We will calculate the allowance based on the volume of water used in products or lost through evaporation.

**Approval and adjustment:** Once approved, the allowance will be applied to your calculated trade effluent or sewerage volume.



## What happens if the circumstances of my business change?

If your business moves premises, is sold, changes its name, or changes its legal entity, it's important to update your trade effluent consent to reflect these changes.

### Notify your retailer

Inform your retailer and your United Utilities regulatory controller about the changes as soon as possible. This ensures that all parties are aware and can assist you with the necessary updates.

### Transfer of consent

If your business is sold, changes its name, or changes its legal entity, the consent cannot be transferred to the new owner. A new application will need to be submitted.

### Review of consent conditions

We will review the existing consent conditions to determine if any adjustments are needed based on the new business circumstances and type of discharge.

### Compliance

Continue to comply with all trade effluent regulations and consent conditions during and after the transition to avoid any penalties or enforcement actions.

### Complete a termination request

If you are no longer discharging trade effluent or move premises, you will need contact your retailer to submit an application to close the consent.



## What should I do if my trade effluent discharge alters, such as increase in volume or a change to the products I make?

If your trade effluent changes in composition or volume your consent will need to be reviewed to ensure the consent is still appropriate.

Here are the steps you should take:

### Notify your retailer

Contact your retailer and regulatory controller to inform them of the changes as soon as possible. They will guide you through the necessary procedures.

### Submit a variation request

You may need to submit a variation request to update your existing trade effluent consent. This ensures that the consent accurately reflects the new conditions of your discharge. It's important to keep your consent up to date to ensure compliance with regulations and avoid potential penalties.

## Pollution prevention guidelines



Preventing a pollution incident from the discharge of trade effluent is critical to protecting the environment and maintaining the integrity of the sewerage system. Key best practices include:

### Effluent discharge

Ensure all trade effluent is directed to the foul sewer, not surface water drains. Keep up to date drainage plans accessible. Regularly inspect private drainage systems and pre-treatment plants for leaks or corrosion.

### Regular monitoring

Routinely check effluent quality and flow to ensure it remains within consented limits. Use calibrated equipment and maintain logs of all measurements.

### Staff training

Ensure all relevant staff are trained on trade effluent procedures, including emergency response and pollution prevention.

### Maintain accurate records

Keep detailed records of effluent monitoring, maintenance activities, and any incidents. These records should be readily available for inspection.

### Site housekeeping

Maintain clean and organised work areas to reduce the risk of accidental discharges and contamination.

### Routine equipment maintenance

Regularly inspect and maintain treatment systems, flow meters, and sampling points to prevent failures or inaccuracies. Ensure safe access to sampling points is maintained.

### Review consent conditions

Periodically review your consent document to ensure ongoing compliance and understanding of all requirements.

### Chemical storage

Store chemicals in bunded areas sized to contain the largest tank plus 10%. Bunds must be impermeable, regularly inspected, and free from rainwater buildup.

### Waste management

Store waste in designated, bunded areas using appropriate containers. Remove waste regularly and never discharge solvents or flammable liquids into the sewer.

### Loading/unloading

Conduct these activities in designated areas, ideally connected to the foul sewer. Install isolation measures if this isn't possible.

### Oil interceptors

Use interceptors where there's a risk of oil contamination. Maintain and empty them regularly. Avoid allowing detergents into interceptors to prevent emulsions.

### Engage with support services

Take advantage of support and advice offered by United Utilities to help maintain compliance and improve practices.

### Communication with retailer and United Utilities

Notify your retailer and your regulatory controller of any planned changes to your processes or effluent characteristics. Promptly report any non-compliance or incidents.

## Spill prevention and response



It's important to act quickly in the event of an unexpected effluent discharge.

Please make sure you take steps to implement spill containment measures and ensure spill kits are accessible. Have a clear incident response plan and train staff accordingly.

In the event of a spillage of chemicals, product or trade waste at your premises, you'll need to act quickly to prevent or minimise any discharge to the sewer network.

You should have an Incident Management Procedure in place, and all your employees should be familiar with it.

In addition, site drainage plans and Material Safety Data Sheets should be readily available for inspection. If there has been a spillage, please take the following actions:

- As far as possible, please prevent the spilled material from entering any drains on site.
- If the spilled material has passed into the site drainage system, please call us on **0345 672 3723** providing details.
- Call the Environment Agency Incident Hotline **0800 80 70 60** if surface water drains are at risk.



# Useful contact information

### Your retailer

Please contact your appointed retailer for assistance with trade effluent consent applications and any queries relating to billing and charges.

A list of approved retailers is available at [open-water.org.uk](http://open-water.org.uk)

### United Utilities

Please contact your Regulatory Controller Trade Effluent for queries relating to the conditions of your consent, sampling and any changes to your business. Please note: you must not contact us if your query relates to billing or charges, please contact your retailer.

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

Emergency (24/7) **0345 672 3723**

### Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat)

Website [ofwat.gov.uk](http://ofwat.gov.uk)

Email [mailbox@ofwat.gov.uk](mailto:mailbox@ofwat.gov.uk)

Call **0121 644 7500**

### Environment Agency

Website [gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency](http://gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency)

Email [enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Call **03708 506 506**