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

United Utilities
Water for the North West

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 a faulty toilet cistern, dripping tap or a leaky showerhead. But dripping 24 hours a day... drip, drip, drip...can make the bills add up.

As a guide, if your drip can fill a mug in 5 minutes, then you're wasting over 30,000 litres of water a year which is costing you around £95.

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 expert!

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.

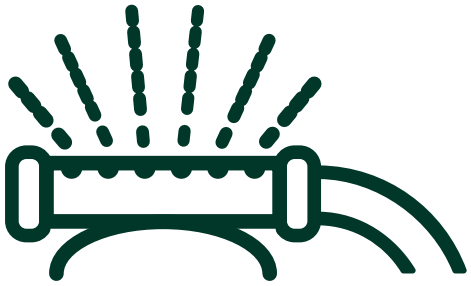
Step 1: Reality check

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?

Thinking back, has there been anything over the previous 12 months which could have resulted in a lot more water being used in your home? For example, home improvements such as building a new extension will have used a lot of water without you even realising it.

Any increase in your regular water use can affect a number of bills and result in a change in your Direct Debit amounts to pay for the increased usage.

For example, if you've installed a thirsty new household appliance recently, such as a power shower or have been giving the hosepipe or sprinkler a regular workout, 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 increase the amount of 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** to give it a try – you may find that you are using more water than you thought, and your water charges are correct.

Turn the page for Step 2

For further information

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: Could your toilet be the culprit?

One of the main reasons for a sudden increase in water use is a faulty toilet cistern. Newer push button toilet cisterns tend to overflow into the bowl rather than via an overflow pipe through the outer wall of your home. As these leaks are not easy to spot they can waste an incredible amount of water.

If you have a faulty cistern you may be able to hear a faint hissing sound as the cistern is constantly refilling. Another way to check is to dry the back of the toilet bowl before placing a piece of dry toilet paper on it. You'll soon see the toilet paper get wet if water is trickling down into the toilet from the cistern.

Other more obvious signs of leaks in the home include:

- ***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.

If you find any of the above to be the reason for your leak and need a plumber to make the repair, please visit watersafe.org.uk to locate an industry-approved plumber in your area.

Step 3: Use your meter to check for leaks

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 use your water meter to check for leaks.

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

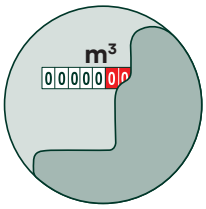
Inside: it's normally fitted close to your internal stop tap, which in many homes is under the kitchen sink, in the downstairs loo, on in your garage.
Outside: usually near the boundary of your home, such as in the front garden, your drive or in the footpath. You may need a screwdriver to lift the outer lid.

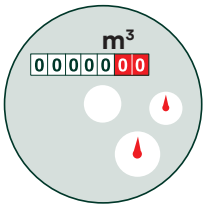
You can also sometimes find it in a wall-mounted box on the side of your home.

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 red digits).***
- ***Don't use any water for at least two hours, 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.





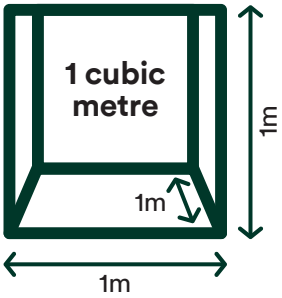
Your meter will look like one of these diagrams above - remember to read both the black and red digits and dials when testing for leaks.

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 around £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.

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

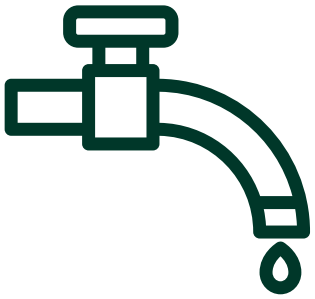
So, your meter is turning even when you're not using any water. This could indicate a leak.

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. Visit **watersafe.org.uk** to find a plumber in your area.

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 these checks, you believe your meter could be faulty, then we can take it away to be tested. Your meter will be taken to an independent test centre, and a new one installed in its place. Don't worry, the old meter won't be reinstalled, even if it passes the test.

Your old meter will be tested on a Trading Standards approved test rig, and its performance measured against national guidelines. If the test proves that the meter isn't faulty, you will have to pay for the cost of the test, which currently stands at £70.00 plus VAT and no amendments will be made to your bill.

However, if it fails we will pay for the test, and amend your bill based on the results of the test. When working out how much we owe you, we will assume that the meter has been faulty since the last but one reading. We'll write to you to explain how we have done the sums, when the time comes.

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

United Utilities
Water for the North West

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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