

West Cumbria water supplies

Q&A July 2021

What's happening to my water?

At the moment, drinking water for your area is supplied from Ennerdale Water. However, due to the importance Ennerdale plays in the protection of local wildlife, we will be unable to abstract water from Ennerdale from 2022. This is the reason why we're currently constructing a new pipeline to supply water to your area from Thirlmere Reservoir rather than Ennerdale Water which should be complete by 2022.

Until the new pipeline is operational we have a commitment, following an agreement with the Environment Agency, that we would be able to source 80 per cent of your water from Ennerdale Water and 20 per cent from local boreholes. We would only need to review this if we were in a period of prolonged dry weather.

Unfortunately, low rainfall over the previous few weeks has resulted in water levels in Ennerdale being lower than we'd like them to be. With the outlook showing a continued period of low rainfall, we need to take steps now to ensure you continue to receive water to your taps if the drier spell continues over the summer months.

Therefore, from later this week we may need to change the blend of the water that is supplied to West Cumbria by increasing the amount from the boreholes. This means the blend of your water, if we had to make the change, would be 50/50 rather than 80/20.

Do I live in an area that will receive the blended water?

The areas that will receive blended water are:

Parts of Workington, Whitehaven, Distington, Cleator Moor, Moresby, Egremont, Frizington, Seascale, Gosforth, Bootle, St. Bees and Ennerdale Bridge.

What does this mean for me?

The hardness of your tap water may increase if we have to take more water from the boreholes as the dry spell continues. Borehole water undergoes the same rigorous treatment process as our other water sources such as lake water. **Your water will continue to be of the quality expected by the Drinking Water Inspectorate and will be safe to drink and use as normal.**

We carry out regular routine testing of the water supply to ensure it meets the high water quality standards expected.

As soon as the situation improves, we will go back to making sure your tap water is the 80/20 blend we have committed to supplying until the Thirlmere pipeline is built.

When are the changes to my tap water being made?

We are planning to make this change from later this week but this will depend on the amount of rain that falls in your area over the next week. We'll provide regular current updates on our website unitedutilities.com/ennerdale and on social media.

Will you be supplying bottled water?

No – your tap water meets all water quality standards required by the Drinking Water Inspectorate and is safe to drink and use so there is no need to use bottled water.

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Will I be compensated for this change?

Although we are planning on increasing borehole water to the overall blend, the water still meets all water quality standards set by the Drinking Water Inspectorate and is safe to drink and use normally. We therefore will not be offering compensation for this change.

How do I get more information?

Please visit unitedutilities.com/ennerdale for information about the work we're doing in your area.

We have a dedicated team who will be able to answer your questions specifically about the supply arrangements in West Cumbria and you can contact them using this on line form

unitedutilities.com/feedback. If you include your phone number we'll also call you back at a time to suit you.

Will I notice a difference when you change the blend?

Some people may notice a change in the taste - tea and coffee may taste slightly different, or the chlorine used in our treatment process may be more noticeable - but this is perfectly normal when harder sources of water such as borehole water is added to the blend. **Your drinking water still meets all water quality standards required by the Drinking Water Inspectorate and is safe to drink and use as normal.** Blending water from different sources is absolutely safe for us to do so and we have been blending your water supplies for a while but will now need to increase the proportion of hard water from our borehole sources further than before.

Adding borehole water will not make your water discoloured – if you experience discoloured water this won't be related to the changes we're making to your drinking water so please visit unitedutilities.com/help-and-support/your-water-supply/drinking-water-quality/ for advice on what could be causing this.

Does borehole water contain high levels of iron?

No – borehole sources contain low levels of iron, actually lower levels than is currently found in lake water.

Will the change in water make me ill?

Your water will continue to remain of the quality expected by the Drinking Water Inspectorate and be safe to drink and to use.

We carry out regular routine testing of the water supply to ensure it meets the high water quality standards expected.

Borehole water undergoes the same rigorous testing and treatment process as our other drinking water sources to ensure it meets all water quality standards.

Will the change cause my kettle to make a popping sound?

It may do - when the water blend was first changed, some customers told us their kettles made a popping sound.

The sound comes from tiny bubbles forming and collapsing as the water boils and harder water sometimes produces more bubbles because the minerals in the water can produce carbon dioxide gas when it heats up (like in fizzy drinks).The bubbles pop when they rise to the surface which is the sound you may hear but there's no need to be concerned.

Do I need products such as Calgon in my washing machine?

We anticipate the water quality to vary from very soft to soft.

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As the water will remain soft the majority of the time, and this is a temporary measure, we do not anticipate the need for additional softening products but you may wish to take advice from the manufacturer.

Do I need to use bottled water for drinking or for babies' bottles?

You do not need to use bottled water. We understand some might choose to use bottled water. Some brands of bottled water are very hard and contain lots of minerals. Some bottled waters contain sodium or nitrates which are not good for babies. Always check the label if you do decide to use bottled water. Most well-known brands of bottles water sold in the UK are suitable but you need to ensure sodium is less than 250 mg/l and nitrate is less than 50 mg NO₃/l.

Will there be a hosepipe ban in my area?

A hosepipe ban is always a last resort for us and we have no plans to introduce restrictions at this time. We would always provide more information about the need for any such restrictions well in advance of them being put in place and confirm the date from which they apply as well as details of who the restrictions will apply to.

We would really appreciate your support during this time so together we can make sure everyone has what they need for their most essential needs and to protect the environment and wildlife which is so unique to West Cumbria.

During the last 15 months, we've all been spending more time in our homes and gardens due to coronavirus restrictions and as such, water usage has increased. Therefore, anything you can do to limit unnecessary water use would be appreciated at this time but please remember to continue to follow government advice around hygiene and hand washing to limit the spread of the virus. You can find lots of hints and tips on how to save water at our website unitedutilities.com/watertight where you can also order free items to help you reduce the amount of water used in the home.

I'm washing my hands more during coronavirus. Will the harder water irritate my skin?

Hard water doesn't affect skin but soap residue can do. Harder water means less soap lather. People sometimes use more soap and that can affect sensitive skin. If you do have dry or sensitive skin, the use of fragrance free moisturising hand creams after washing and drying your hands can help. For further advice on looking after your skin please visit nhs.uk

How can I save water when I'm washing my hands more during coronavirus?

We absolutely don't want you to stop washing your hands, it's really important that you continue to follow government advice so that you can limit the spread of the virus. It's really easy to save water in other ways, like by turning the tap off when you brush your teeth and using a watering can, rather than a hosepipe in the garden, making these small changes can make a big difference. We have lots of tips on our website unitedutilities.com/savewater

We had lots of rain over winter, why are you having to make these changes after just a few weeks of dry weather?

There are a few things that are unique to the area supplied by Ennerdale Water that can affect water resources. Firstly, the area is not connected to our integrated North West network which means we cannot easily transfer water from other parts of the region when Ennerdale is low. Levels in the reservoir do tend to fall quickly during periods of dry weather. Secondly, due to the sensitive nature of the local environment, we are not allowed to continue to abstract water from the reservoir as this is likely to harm wildlife which rely on Ennerdale Water. This is why we have to take steps such as changing the water blend to protect water resources in the area.

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I have a medical condition, should I be worried?

No, the water you will receive will still be of the same high quality standards expected by the Drinking Water Inspectorate and be safe to drink and to use.

We carry out regular routine testing of the water supply to ensure it meets the high water quality standards expected. There is no reason to believe that the water supply will cause illness as hard water is not harmful to health.

Borehole water undergoes the same rigorous testing and treatment process as our other drinking water sources to ensure it meets all water quality standards.

How long before my water returns to its normal blend?

We will only supply water at this blend for the time it is absolutely necessary in relation to the water resources situation in West Cumbria. A period of rainfall would improve that position and we would not delay returning to your normal 80/20 blend as soon as we receive enough rain for water levels at Ennerdale to return to healthy levels.