

West Cumbria water supplies

Update for customers and Q&A

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Updated 22 August 2017

- Alongside the routine sampling which we have continued to do across the Copeland area (which we carry out every day), we have now carried out more than 110 samples at customer taps. Independent sampling has also been undertaken that has confirmed that the quality of the water is as it should be.
- We have been working with the Environment Agency and other stakeholders to find a compromise which can ensure we meet the needs and expectations of our customers while still protecting the local environment and meet our obligations.

Q&As

Is this an admission that you got it wrong?

No, we made the changes originally for all the right reasons, in order to meet our obligations to help protect the environment. We have been listening to our customers and we're really pleased to have been able to reach a compromise.

Why has it taken such a huge protest from your customers and the MP before you reconsidered?

We do listen to our customers but this was not a decision we could make on our own. There has been a lot of work going on behind the scenes with the other agencies to reach today's compromise which is good news for customers and the environment.

Why are you not closing the boreholes completely?

This is a compromise. There are important environmental reasons why we must take less water from Ennerdale and that shortfall is made up using borehole water. Today's agreement allows us to keep the amount of borehole water to a minimum.

Will people notice a difference when you reduce the blend?

Yes, the water will be consistently softer.

What do you say to all your customers who have had sickness complaints since you changed the supply?

We carry out regular routine testing of the water supply both at source and at customers' taps and we know it meets the high water quality standards expected. There is no reason to believe that the water supply is causing illness as hard water is not harmful to health and there is no good evidence to suggest that it can exacerbate existing conditions

There could be other reasons if people have been unwell so we'd suggest people see their doctor for peace of mind.

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What is the difference between the new arrangement and the previous arrangement?

Customers will now receive a consistent supply of soft water throughout the year as opposed to a fluctuating supply which would have been much harder for about a third of the year.

When will this change be implemented?

This new blend will mean your water will revert back to being soft all year round but to do this we need to make some modifications to our pump operation so this change will happen in September.

When will we stop receiving this blended water?

We have reached an agreement that the boreholes will run at a lower rate until the new Thirlmere pipeline is built in 2022.

Why can't we just switch the boreholes off?

We have to continue use borehole water to supplement the supplies to our customers to ensure that there is sufficient water at all times. This new way of operating provides a more acceptable water blend, ensures a resilient supply of water and provides the required environmental protection.

Updated 13 July

- Alongside the routine sampling which we have continued to do across the Copeland area (which we carry out every day), we have now carried out more than 95 samples at customer taps
- We want to reassure customers that every one of these samples is showing the water is of the stringent standard expected and is safe to drink and use
- The Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) has also done its own independent assessment of the water quality samples in that area, following the changes made to the blend of water customers are now receiving, and have also confirmed the quality is exactly as it should be
- We fully appreciate that any change will cause concern but we hope that the results from the sampling, alongside that of the DWI, reassures customers that it is ok and safe to drink and use as normal
- We've obviously been concerned that some customers say they have been unwell since the water change was made. The sample results confirm the water is of the quality it should be but we understand how worrying that will have been for people
- We would always advise anybody who has been unwell to see their own doctor for peace of mind as there may be other reasons why that could be the case
- Some customers have also raised the issue of the water triggering skin conditions. While we are now blending Ennerdale water with harder water from the boreholes near Egremont, the blend of water which customers are getting through their taps is still classified as 'soft'. There are other areas in Cumbria where the water, as normal, is 'moderately hard'
- Hard water doesn't affect skin conditions but soap residue can do and harder water does generate less soap lather so it can mean people use more soap than usual and this can affect more sensitive skin

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- We understand why some customers might have chosen to buy bottled water as a result of their concerns but some brands of bottled water are very hard and contain lots of minerals and customers should be aware of this if they are concerned about hardness.
- Bottled water also contain nitrates which are not good for babies, so we would always advise customers to check the label if you do decide to use bottled water.

Why did UU not inform us of this change in our water?

We can only apologise that we did not do enough to let customers know what was being planned in advance in terms of the changes to their water supply.

Who is receiving the borehole water?

The areas that can be fed with a blend of Egremont/ Ennerdale water are:

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

Will we receive borehole water forever?

Abstracting water from Ennerdale will completely stop in the long term once the new £300 million pipeline linking West Cumbria to Thirlmere Reservoir is complete in 2022. Copeland supplies will be provided with Thirlmere Water.

Is my water safe?

Yes extensive sampling at Ennerdale WTW and at customers' taps across the area has shown that the water meets the required water quality standards and is safe to drink and use.

What preparation and investigation was done to ensure water quality

Extensive drilling and water testing was undertaken to ensure that the water quality is suitable for public use. We have completed tests in order to comply with the strict water quality standards set by the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) and the change in supply was approved by the DWI in March.

The boreholes are drilled close to Sellafield. Is it radioactive?

The water from these boreholes does not contain radioactive contamination.

Is the work you're doing linked to Sellafield?

No. There is no connection between current or future operations at Sellafield and our work.

Is the work you're doing linked to the talks about the possibility of looking for a site for nuclear waste disposal?

No. There is no link between the discussions about nuclear waste disposal and our work.

Is the work you're doing linked to the supplying the new nuclear plant on the West coast?

No. There is no plan to provide large volumes of water for the new nuclear plant.

Why does my water taste different?

As Ennerdale water has been blended with South Egremont water, the chemical make-up of the water is slightly different. Blending water from different sources is absolutely safe to do and we have been blending

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these water supplies for a while but have recently increased the proportion from the boreholes further than before.

Why is my kettle popping?

The popping noise can be explained by tiny bubbles forming and collapsing as the water boils and is due to the slightly harder water. Water produces bubbles when it heats up in a kettle.

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.

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

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

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

Is the water making us ill?

We carry out regular routine testing of the water supply both at source and at customers' taps and we know it meets the high water quality standards expected. There is no reason to believe that the water supply is causing illness as hard water is not harmful to health and there is no good evidence to suggest that it can exacerbate existing conditions.

There could be other reasons if people have been unwell so we'd suggest people see their doctor for peace of mind.

Is the water causing skin rashes / eczema?

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.

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

People 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.

How long will this continue for?

We will need to continue to blend the water supply in this area until the Thirlmere pipeline is in supply which is by 2022. Until that time, if the water level in Ennerdale drops below the weir crest, then customers will receive a blend of approximately 50 % borehole water and 50% Ennerdale water so that we can keep supplying the community with water while still also protecting the wildlife in that area. If Ennerdale is spilling, that means we can switch the boreholes off and supply 100% Ennerdale water.

Why are you fluoridating now and will you continue to do so?

We do not make or influence decisions on fluoridation. That is the responsibility of Public Health England. We are legally required to fluoridate parts of West Cumbria and will continue to do so, as normal.

How deep are the boreholes?

They are around 50m deep and abstract water from the sandstone aquifer.