

MONTHLY GATESHEAD HEALTH STAFF ADVICE BULLETIN

ISSUE 28: Water Leakages and Supplier Complaints

This month saw the celebration of Earth Day, which has been held on the 22nd April since 1970. It was created to demonstrate support for environmental protection and to stand up for a more equitable future for us all. As we reflect on the importance of Earth Day, this bulletin will focus on water, specifically your home water supply.

Water is a vital resource that all of us need and should be able to use, without fear of not being able to pay or an insufficient supply. This focus comes at a time when many people's finances are being stretched by bills and certain water suppliers are being put under scrutiny for pollution and measures around leakages. This bulletin will focus on what to do if you are experiencing leaks, and how to make a complaint about your water company when you have a complaint about your bill, water supply, or standard of service.

What is a leak?

A water leak doesn't necessarily mean that there is water spilling out into your home, it could be as simple as a dripping tap or a leaking toilet that needs repairing. It can be surprising how much water is wasted from these.



A leaking toilet could be wasting 215 litres of water a day. Costing around £200 a year!

How to spot a leak in your home

If your water bills are higher than usual, there's a drop in water pressure, or your water meter (if you have one) is recording usage when you're not using water, you may have a leak in your home.

How to do a leak test:

- 1) Make sure all taps are off and that you aren't using any appliances or the bathroom during the test.
- 2) Take a meter reading, noting all the digits and dials.
- 3) Give it some time before taking your second reading and see if the meter has increased without any water being used.



Taking a reading before bed and then the second reading the following morning is a good way to do it.

If the second reading is higher than your first reading and no water has been used, you may want to take some further steps to check if it is to do with your private pipework or the water suppliers pipes.

- 4) Turn off all taps, including the internal stop tap. This can usually be found under the kitchen sink or in a connecting garage. You can check the water is off by turning your kitchen tap on, until the water stops running. (If the water is still flowing you may not have shut it properly or the stop tap is faulty and needs replacing)
- 5) Repeat the meter reading process. Take one reading, wait a reasonable amount of time, and then take the second reading.

What to do if you have a leak

If your reading is higher after step 3, but not after step 5 then the problem is likely to be with your private pipework.

For private pipework issues it is worth checking if your insurance policies cover leak repairs. If you choose to get a plumber to repair it, think about using approved contractors. Contact your water provider to let them know the date of repair.



[WaterSafe](#) for example, provide information on locally approved plumbers.

If your meter reading is higher after step 3 and 5, contact your water provider to look into the problem.

If your water provider is Northumbria Water you can follow this - [link](#).

Leaky loos

Your toilet may be leaking if you can see or hear water running constantly. Northumbria Water offers a service where they may be able to **fix it for free** or order a free replacement part. For information on this follow: [Leaky loos \(nwl.co.uk\)](#)



Some water companies offer a **leak allowance**. A leak allowance can reduce bills and cover the cost of water you've lost through a leak. It's worth checking your suppliers website or contacting them for more details. Leak allowances are usually granted to those who fix leaks.

Complaining about your water company

There are various reasons you might want to complain to your water company. This could include complaints about:

- failure to keep an appointment
- interruption to your water supply
- water pressure
- the way they have handled an account query.

You may be entitled to compensation for some complaints.

For more about when you might want to complain to your water company and when you're entitled to compensation, follow this [link](#).

Each water company has a complaints procedure which is usually in two stages. If you write to the company, you should receive a reply within ten working days.

If the company doesn't reply in this time, they must pay £20 as compensation within ten working days. If they don't pay the compensation in time, you can ask for a further payment of £10, as long as you do this within three months.

Complaining to the Consumer Council for Water (CCW)

If you've been through all the stages of your water company's written complaints procedure and are still unhappy with their response, you can refer the matter to CCW. You can contact them via email or letter, this method allows you to attach copies of any communication with the water company. Alternatively there is an online form and telephone contact.

Complaints about water quality and the environment

If your complaint is about water quality, you should contact the **Drinking Water Inspectorate** (DWI). For enquiries about private drinking water supplies contact the **Environmental Health department of your local authority**.

If you have an enquiry about the environment, contact the **Environment Agency**. The Environment Agency is responsible for maintaining or improving the quality of fresh, marine, surface and underground water.

For further information on complaints see the Citizens Advice [website](#)



With Earth Day in mind, it's worth checking other ways to reduce water usage. More information on how to do this, can usually be found on your water suppliers website.

Remember you can get in touch with your Citizens Advice Gateshead team for impartial advice, information, and guidance.

Email qestaffswa@citizensadvicegateshead.org.uk or call 0191 490 4231 and we'll be back in touch with you within 1 working day Monday to Friday.