

Your wastewater services

We're proud to provide an essential service that's at the heart of daily life, health and enjoyment for 14 million customers. Every day at our 350 sewage treatment works, we remove and treat more than four billion litres of sewage through our 108,838km of sewers and 2,950 pumping stations. We also have two sludge powered generators and 21 combined heat and power plants generating 176 GWh of renewable electricity.

This section tells you about:

- types of sewers
- who is responsible for what
- the quality of our treated wastewater
- blockages
- sewer flooding
- building over/near a public sewer
- new sewer connections.

In an emergency, call our 24 hour customer service team on **0800 316 9800**.

There's a 24 hour Textphone service for the deaf or hard of hearing on **0800 316 9898**. Please note, voice calls or mobile numbers aren't accepted via this number.

Further information is available at thameswater.co.uk/drains.

Drains, sewers and highway gullies

What are drains, sewers and gullies?

- Drains carry foul sewage, wastewater or rainfall from a single property.
- Lateral drains are an extension of private drains that lay outside of a property boundary and connects with our public sewer.
- Sewers carries sewage, wastewater and rainfall from more than one property.
- Highway gullies or drains, remove rainwater from roads and pavements.
- A culverted watercourse is a visible surface watercourse that has travelled through pipework under roads, driveways or housing developments.

Types of sewers

Foul sewers

Foul sewers carry water that has been used for cooking, washing, as well as waste from toilets to our sewage treatment works.

Surface water sewers

Surface water sewers carry rainwater that runs off roofs, some roads and other hard surfaces. If we take away your rainwater from your property but don't treat it because our sewer carries it to a watercourse, or soakaway, you are still liable to pay the surface water drainage charge.

Most properties are connected to our sewers for this purpose, but some aren't. If no rainwater drains to our sewers from your property, you don't have to pay for this service. But if any rainwater from your property does, full surface water drainage charges still apply. Please refer to 'Our charges and your bills' for more information.

Combined sewers

Normally foul and surface water drainage are kept separate and are carried away from your property in different pipework. All new properties should have separate drains for foul and surface water drainage and it's important the wastewater from washing machines and dishwashers is connected to your foul drain.

Where there are combined public sewers in the road, the pipework in and around your property may either carry both wastewater and rainfall in a single drain, or in two separate drains and then connect with our sewers.

Who is responsible for drains, sewers, gullies and pumping stations?

Lateral drains outside a property boundary and sewers

We're responsible for any drains outside of your property boundary, known as a lateral drain, which directly discharges to our public sewer system. We're not responsible for lateral drains that discharge into a cesspool or soakaway. We're also responsible for most sewers. See section below on 'Private sewers'. In most cases, our sewers are in roads or public open spaces. Where our sewers run through private land we have the right of access to maintain and repair them. We'll comply with our code of practice - Pipelaying powers on private land. You can download this from our website at thameswater.co.uk/literature or request a copy by calling us on **0800 316 9800**.

Surface and underground watercourses

If an underground watercourse passes through your property or land, you're legally defined as a 'riparian landowner' under the Land Drainage Act 1991 and 1994. This means you're responsible for its maintenance and repair. This may also apply to a surface watercourse you use.

Drains inside a property boundary

All underground drainage serving only your property, which is situated within your property boundary, is your responsibility. If you have any problems with your own drains or wastewater pipes, you'll need to get your own plumber. If you have home emergency cover insurance you may be covered for this work.

If you don't have your own plumber or home emergency cover insurance visit thameswater.co.uk/findaplumber or call us on **0800 316 9800** and we'll give you advice about approved contractors who should be able to help you. You may have to pay a call out charge along with all repair costs.

The companies listed only employ qualified, named plumbers or underground workers who are familiar with the requirements of the water regulations. Although we regularly review this list, we can't give an assurance on availability or guarantee specific work. Also, we can't get involved in any contractual disputes between a customer and plumber or underground worker.

Gullies and drains in the road

It's the responsibility of your highway authority to clean and unblock gullies and drains alongside public roads.

Manhole covers

If you discover a broken manhole cover in the road please let your local highway authority know in the first instance. If there's a broken manhole cover on private land please call us on **0800 316 9800** and we'll come and check who owns it.

Private sewers

On 1 October 2011, we became responsible for a lot of private sewers that were previously the responsibility of property owners. Not all private sewers were included. There are some cases where the property owner remains responsible for sections of pipe between the property/building and the lateral drain or private sewer owned by us.

To help you understand how the sewer transfer affects you visit thameswater.co.uk/privatesewers you can also visit www.defra.gov.uk for more information.

Private pumping stations

Some properties, for example small housing developments, are connected to what was previously a private pumping station before they connect to our main sewers. You're likely to know if this is the case with your property. On 1 October 2016, we became responsible for these pumping stations.

The quality of treated wastewater

The Environment Agency (EA) regularly checks the treated water we release from our sewage treatment works. The EA maintains a public register of these results. You can ask to inspect this register by calling the EA on **03708 506 506** or by visiting environment.data.gov.uk/index.html.

At the time of publishing this code all our treatment facilities are working within the EA's compliance guidelines.

Blockages

We clear around 80,000 blockages from our sewers every year. Blocked sewers can lead to sewage spilling out of manholes, into properties and even rivers.

Many thousands of drains and sewers become blocked because of misuse. For example, flushing away fat or grease down the loo or sink rather than putting it in the bin.

You may have a blocked drain or sewer if it's difficult to flush your loo, water drains away very slowly, there's a smell coming from your drains, or there's an overflowing manhole nearby.

If you think you have a problem with the drains and sewers serving your property, or if you notice wastewater flowing into a river or stream, please call us on **0800 316 9800**. One of our team will be here to help, 24 hours a day.

What causes blockages?

The majority of blockages are caused by the wrong things being put down the loo or flushed away down the sink and drains. Sewers are only designed to take away human waste, toilet tissue and water. For further details go to thameswater.co.uk/blockages.

Bin it, don't block it

We're working hard to fight fatbergs, prevent blockages and help people understand what can and can't go down the drain. For more and advice on getting rid of waste products safely go to thameswater.co.uk/blockages.

Who clears blockages?

We clear blockages found in the public sewer. If we're unsure of where the blockage is, we will come and investigate. If it's found in the public sewer, we will clear it or if it's in your drain, we'll let you know if you need to make your own arrangements for it to be removed. Alternatively, for a fixed fee, we can spend up to two hours investigating and clearing the blockage. Just call us on the telephone number below if you'd like us to do this for you. If the blockage happens again within seven days, we'll look at it again for free.

It may be our responsibility if one of the following applies:

- the problem is outside your property boundary
- more than one property is having problems
- there's widespread sewer flooding in your area.

If you're unsure or you would like further advice, call us on **0800 316 9800**.

To 'meet' our sewer flushers go to thameswater.co.uk/sewerflushers.

When we'll get to you

We'll try to get to you within six hours of being told about the problem. But, depending on the severity of the blockage, this could range from one to 24 hours. When you call us about the problem we'll let you know when we'll be able to get to you. When we visit, we'll confirm if the blocked pipework belongs to us or to you.

If the blockage is in your drain

Your own plumber should be able to help you clear a blockage from your private drain. Alternatively, some insurance policies cover the cost of blockage clearances. You may wish to check the terms of any policy you might have to see if you are covered.

If you don't have your own plumber or home emergency cover visit thameswater.co.uk/findaplumber or call us on **0800 316 9800** and we'll give you advice about water regulations approved plumbers who may be able to help you. You may have to pay a call out charge along with all repair costs.

The companies listed only employ qualified named plumbers or underground workers, who are familiar with the requirements of the Water Regulations. Blockage clearance services may not be offered by all companies who are part of this scheme. Although we regularly review this list, we cannot give assurance on availability or guarantee their work. We will not get involved in any contractual disputes between a customer and plumber or underground worker.

In our lateral drains and sewers

If the blockage is in our lateral drain or public sewer we will clear it for free.

Sewer flooding

You can find out all about sewer flooding and what to do when a sewer floods your home at thameswater.co.uk/sewerflooding.

Our sewers work hard

Climate change, population growth and the paving over of green spaces that provide natural drainage are putting increasing pressure on our sewers. This is often made worse by people putting unsuitable products down the sink or loo.

Many areas have separate sewers to take foul waste and rainwater. But in much of London and some other built up areas the sewer system is combined. This means foul sewage and wastewater from kitchens and toilets mixes with rainfall.

During a heavy storm the flow in the sewer is much greater and can reach maximum capacity.

When this happens sewage can overflow from manholes and gullies and flood land, gardens and rivers. In the worst cases, sewage can even flood homes.

Our investment in flood alleviation schemes takes into account the severity and frequency of flooding in specific areas. It's therefore important you let us know of any flooding you experience, so we can keep our records up-to-date.

Properties at risk of flooding

It's important you know if your property may be at risk of sewer flooding and whether you need insurance against this risk. If you are experiencing sewer flooding at your home please call us straight away on **0800 316 9800**. Our lines are open 24 hours a day.

If you want to find out if the area where your property is located is liable to sewer flooding please call our Property Searches team on 0845 070 9148 for further information and costs. Our lines are open Monday to Friday from 8.30am until 5pm. You can also visit our website at thameswater-propertysearches.co.uk for more details.

Repeated incidents of internal flooding

Unfortunately some properties suffer repeated incidents of internal flooding and we're unable to offer any short-term solution.

If we've confirmed with you that your property is at risk of repeated internal flooding, we'll regularly monitor the situation and offer immediate help. We maintain a special list of all these properties and have a dedicated sewer flooding line **0800 056 2625** to help customers in this situation as detailed earlier in this section.

If your property is on our list, we'll make a minimum payment of £500 and a maximum payment of £1,000 each time flooding happens and we'll provide a full clean up service. You are not eligible for an external flooding payment if you're entitled to an internal flooding payment due to the same incident.

Building over or near a public sewer

If you're planning a new building or an extension to your home, and are working either above or near a sewer, it's important you let us know. We need to make sure this won't accidentally affect a sewer, or limit our access if we need to repair it.

Once we're happy with your proposals, we'll issue a 'build over' agreement. Find out more at thameswater.co.uk/buildover or call us on **0800 009 3921**.

New sewer connections

If you're planning to connect to one of our sewers, you'll need our consent before you go ahead. That's because we need to check the connection will work as planned, and that it won't potentially cause problems like sewer flooding or pollution. We have legal duties around this, set out in Section 94 of the Water Industry Act 1991.

You'll need to give us details of the drain to be connected and how the connection will be made. You will be responsible for costs associated with the application and carrying out the connection. The connection can be made by your choice of qualified contractors, unless it's to a trunk sewer, in which case we will need to carry out the work for you.

Find out more at thameswater.co.uk/sewerconnections or call us on **0800 009 3921**.