



Private
blockages
policy.

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1. Background

The Water Act 2014 includes provisions for market opening for all non-household premises on 1 April 2017. This is one of a number of policies that are being developed specifically for TWUL Wholesale Wastewater to adopt post 1 April 2017.

A private blockage is a blockage that occurs in a pipe that is not owned by TWUL Wholesale Wastewater. As we are not responsible for maintenance and repair of private pipes, responsibility for blockage clearance rests with the owner of the pipe, which is normally the property owner. We developed our Private Blockages Policy to set out the framework and outline key principles for how we will approach a private blockage incident.

2. Scope

This document sets out our approach when we find a blockage in a private pipe within our wholesale operational area. This policy applies to all Thames Water employees, retailers and third parties.

For the avoidance of doubt, this policy applies to all private pipes within our wholesale operational area, including those owned by both household and non-household customers.

This document covers the following:

- ownership
- call handling
- cancelling visits
- call on route
- investigation
- customer offer (if applicable)
- promises and appointments
- updating the customer
- notification to retailer(s).

3. Definition of terms

Customer -The individual party that originally contacted us to report a blockage, including: the property owner, occupier, neighbouring property, passer-by, local authority or any other third party agency (Environment Agency) as well as the impacted party, if different (where applies to one specific group, it will be referred appropriately)

Operational area - The geographical area where we provide water and wastewater services. A separate operational area exists for water and wastewater services.

Primary charges - All those charges in the Wholesale Tariff Document that relate to the supply of water and sewerage services both on an enduring or temporary basis, and including:

- fixed and volumetric charges and allowances,
- any other charges set out in the Wholesale Tariff Document in relation to specific circumstances or events,

but excluding,

- all charges that relate to the provision of one off or discrete services performed pursuant to the Operational Terms,

together with all such charges calculated in relation to a Special Agreement by reference to the relevant Factor(s) and Tariff(s) as set out in the Special Agreements Register

Private pipe - A pipe that is not owned by Thames Water Utilities Limited Wholesale Wastewater

Retailer - The organisation responsible for providing retail services.

Third parties - Other authorities such as highways authority or Environment Agency

4.Principles

The key principles which have shaped the development of this policy are as follows:

- we investigate any blockage to determine whether it can be classified as private or not.
- we cannot provide a private blockage clearance as part of our primary charges.
- the owner(s) of a private pipe have the choice to use other contractors to clear their private issue.
- the private blockage clearance service may not always be provided eg due to work complexity.
- if during the course of investigation we clear a private blockage, we will not charge.
- we inform the owner(s) of the private pipe(s) that a future blockage in the same area requires private clearance.

5.Policy

a. Ownership

- There are some sections of pipework that are the responsibility of the property owner, local authorities or third parties. Please, refer to the Water Industry Act 1991.

b. Call handling

- We are available for customers to contact us 24/7, 365 days a year.
- When a customer calls to report a blockage, we will collect information about them, including their address, whether the property they are calling about is household or non-household and the appropriate retailer.
- If during the initial call we determine the issue to be private responsibility, we will advise the customer and will not continue with the service and will not attend or investigate further.
- We will collect information from the customer about the symptoms, situation and impact to help a decision about whether a visit is needed, and if so, the appropriate timescale for attendance. We will share with the customer (impacted party) the next steps and raise on the system the most appropriate action(s).

c. Cancelling visits

- We may cancel our visit where we're already investigating or aware of the issue, alternatively where we have found the issue to be a third party or private asset.

d. Call en-route

- While we are on our way to attend an incident, we will attempt to contact the customer (impacted party) and advise that we are en-route.

- We will attempt to contact the customer (impacted party) if we cannot meet our agreed customer promise.

e. Investigation

- When on site, we will begin investigations and may need to liaise directly with the customer to discuss the problem in more detail or gain access to manhole covers inside the property boundary.
- In the course of investigations, we will use equipment available to diagnose the issue and help determine if it's within an asset that is our responsibility.
- Where the issue is as a result of a blockage within our pipe, our Service Recovery Policy applies.
- Where investigations reveal the issue is within a private pipe, we may offer a blockage clearance service on a chargeable basis. This decision will be based on:
 - available equipment on site
 - time required to fix
 - whether higher priority work exists.
- We will not offer private blockage clearance where the issue relates to internal drainage issues within the property.
- During an investigation we will not make a deliberate attempt to clear a blockage.
- During the course of our investigation, where we clear a blockage that is later discovered to be in the customer's (impacted party) private section of the pipe we will not charge for a private clearance.

f. Customer offer (if applicable)

- Where the blockage is in a section of a pipe which is the customer's (impacted party) responsibility we may offer a blockage clearance service. The customer (impacted party) can choose to:
 - accept our offer
 - make alternative arrangements eg choose an alternative drainage contractor, contact their insurance company, contact their landlord or local authority.

g. Promises and appointments

- We deem such reported incidents as requiring immediate attention. As such, this service is provided on a non-appointment basis. However, we may offer an appointment where an initial visit is deferred to the following day. Any appointment will be made directly by us, in agreement with the customer. Appointment slots offered are:
 - 9.00am – 1.00pm or
 - 1.00pm – 5.00pm or
 - two-hour appointments where the customer has requested a more specific time slot.

These appointments can be made and fulfilled 7 days a week.

h. Updating the customer

- Following investigation, we'll share the outcome of the visit with the customer (impacted party).

i. Notification to retailer(s)

- This section only applies to blockages on the private pipes owned by the non-household customer.
- If an appointment is booked we will notify the retailer within 2 business days of this being made. If this appointment date or time is changed, or cancelled, we'll notify the retailer of this change.
- Within 2 days of our visit to investigate, we'll notify the retailer of the visit.
- Where we have identified that additional customers are impacted or we need access to neighbouring customer properties, we'll notify the additional retailer(s).

6.Changes to policy

This policy will be reviewed on a twelve month basis and updated periodically as required.

7.References

- Wholesale Contract/Wholesale – Retail Code
- Service Recovery Policy
- Water Industry Act 1991

8.Appendices

No appendices attached to this document