



Making savings on my water bill

Advice for business customers

How is my bill calculated?

For both water supply and sewerage, there are two elements on your bill - fixed standing charges and variable charges (metered or unmetered). In some areas, sewerage charges are billed separately. Most businesses have a metered water supply. If there is no meter, the variable charges are based on the rateable value of the premises. Where the water supply also serves separately-rated domestic premises each part will be billed separately.

For metered supplies, the variable charges are based on the amount of water recorded since the last reading. Your bill shows how many cubic metres have been used and the cost per cubic metre (m³). 1 cubic metre = 1,000 litres or 220 gallons.

For unmetered supplies, your bill shows the rateable value and the cost per £1 of rateable value. Unless the premises have been substantially downsized since the rateable value was set, you can't ask the water company to change it.

Water used in a production process or a swimming pool may be charged separately under a trade effluent consent by your sewerage company.

Do I receive all the services for which I am billed?

Your water bill covers the cost of supplying water to your premises, including abstraction (collecting water from surface and underground supplies), treatment and distribution. If you have a private

well or borehole and aren't connected to the public water supply, you may be entitled to a refund.

Your sewerage bill may cover all or some of the following services:

- Waste water - collecting, treating and disposing of used water from your premises. If all the waste water is collected in a cesspit or septic tank, you may be entitled to a refund.
- Surface water drainage - collecting, treating and disposing of rainwater run-off from your premises. If no surface water drains directly or indirectly into a public sewer, you may be entitled to a rebate.
- Highway drainage - collecting, treating and disposing of rainwater run-off from highways. You can't claim a rebate.

Is water metering compulsory?

The water company is allowed to install a meter to the water supply of your premises. If it is metered compulsorily, you won't have to pay for fitting the meter. If you choose to have one, you have to pay for its fitting. If your business has a high rateable value and your water use is low, you may benefit by having a meter fitted.

How can I reduce costs?

If you have a metered supply, you have some control over the amount of your bills.



■ **Read the meter regularly.** Ask your water company where it is. Most meters are fitted underground. Fitting an electronic outreader inside your premises will make reading it easier. If you receive an estimated bill, ask the company to replace it with one based on your own reading.

■ **Check for leaks.** If your meter continues to record when no water is being used, there may be a leak in the supply pipe or within your premises. Check for plumbing faults such as continuously flushing urinals or dripping taps.

■ **Look for ways of using water wisely.** See our WaterFacts sheet *Reduce your water and sewerage bills by being water-efficient.*

■ **Claim a leakage allowance for an underground leak.** If the meter is outside your premises, leakage from an underground supply pipe will register. You are responsible for this pipe work. If you repair the leak promptly, your water company may consider a one-off allowance for the cost of the water lost through leakage, or help you to detect and repair leaks where they are accessible. If you can show that the leaked water didn't return to the public sewer, ask your sewerage company to reduce your charges.

■ **Check that your water meter is the right size for your needs.** Fixed charges for both services are based on the size of the supply meter. If your usage has changed, you can ask the company to downsize the meter, usually at your cost.

■ **Check if you are entitled to a surface water drainage rebate.** This is available only where all the rainwater run-off from the roof and ground surfaces drains into a soakaway or directly to a river, canal or the sea.

■ **Check that your surface water drainage charges are correctly calculated.** Some sewerage companies base charges on the surface area or type of premises. Check this has been correctly calculated, particularly if anything has changed. Rebates are not retrospective.

■ **Check if you are entitled to an additional non-return to sewer allowance.** Your sewerage charges assume most of the water returns to the sewer. If you regularly use large amounts of water in manufacturing and can show it doesn't return to the sewer, contact your sewerage company.

■ **If you pay trade effluent charges,** for example if you have an on-site treatment plant to recycle grey water or reduce the strength of effluent before discharge to the public sewer, you may be able to get a reduction.

■ **If your business uses large volumes of water, check you are on the correct tariff.** Some water companies offer a large-user tariff to business customers using above a particular threshold. If you use the same amount daily, you may be able to 'reserve' it at a cheaper rate. If you use 50,000 cubic metres or more a year, consider switching suppliers - see our leaflet *Am I eligible for water competition?* for more details. Some companies offer a tariff that gives customers the risk of occasional supply interruption in exchange for lower charges.

What you can do now

- If you're struggling to pay your bill, discuss it with your water company.
- Check what water and sewerage services you receive and claim a rebate for any service you do not receive.
- Check that you are paying the correct tariff. If you aren't already on a meter, check if you can reduce your bill by installing one.
- Read your meter regularly.
- Follow our tips on using water wisely.
- Consider installing on-site treatment before discharging effluent.

You have a right to a clear, detailed and timely response to complaints and enquiries and a responsibility to talk to your local water company as soon as you have a problem.

You have a right to clear information about the different tariffs available and a responsibility to read the information sent with the bill.

You have a right to ask to have a water meter installed and a responsibility to find out how to use water wisely and how a meter may help.

There is a range of printed fact sheets available from the Consumer Council for Water or visit www.ccwater.org.uk.