



Flooding from Public Sewers

Your questions answered

CONSUMER COUNCIL FOR



Very few people are affected by public sewers flooding their home or garden, but for those who are it is an extremely unpleasant and distressing event.

The Consumer Council for Water will continue its campaign to make sure the sewerage companies tackle the causes of sewer flooding as a priority.

However, solutions are often large scale projects and can be costly, which means that companies cannot sort out all problems quickly.

As a result, we are working with the sewerage companies to give consumers as much help and information as possible.

This leaflet answers some of the most frequently asked questions about sewer flooding. You can get more detailed information and help from your local sewerage company (see the back page of this leaflet for contact details).

What is sewer flooding and why does it happen?

Sewer flooding can happen when sewage escapes through a manhole, a sewer pipe or drain, or by backing up through toilets and showers.

Sewer flooding can be caused by:

- blockages in a sewer pipe
- failure of sewerage companies' equipment
- the sewer being too small to deal with the amount of sewage entering it
- too much rainwater entering the sewers e.g. from roads, houses and fields
- rivers and watercourses that have overflowed and flooded the sewers through manholes
- groundwater levels rising after long periods of rainfall and entering the sewer.

The cause of the problem may be some distance away from where the sewer flooding is happening.

If sewage enters a building, it is called 'internal flooding'. If it floods gardens, or surrounding areas such as roads or public spaces it is called 'external flooding'.

Who is responsible for the sewerage system?

The sewerage system is made up of public sewers and private drains. The local sewerage company is responsible for the public sewerage system, and should make sure it is cleaned, maintained and extended to provide adequate drainage for the area.

Property owners are responsible for private drains on their property up to the point where they connect to the public sewer.

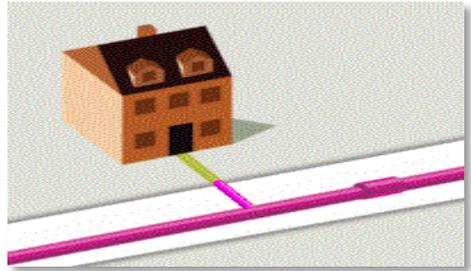
If you own your property it is a good idea to check the drainage arrangements. The property deeds may show the layout of drains and sewers. You can also ask to see the public sewer map, which is kept by your local sewerage company.

If your property is not connected to the public sewerage system and uses a cesspit or septic tank, this is your responsibility. You will need to arrange for someone to empty and maintain it.

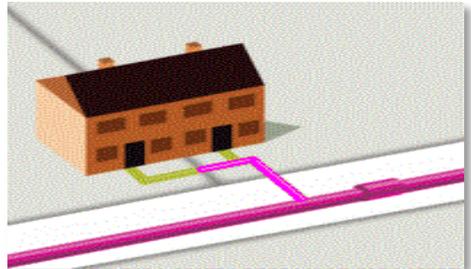
The pictures opposite show in **pink** the pipes that the sewerage company is responsible for.

The **green** pipe is the responsibility of the property owner.

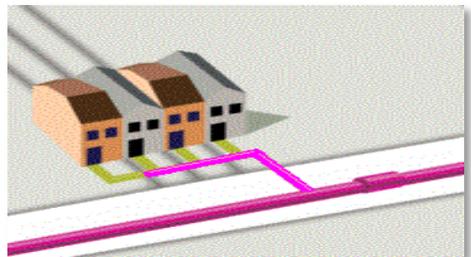
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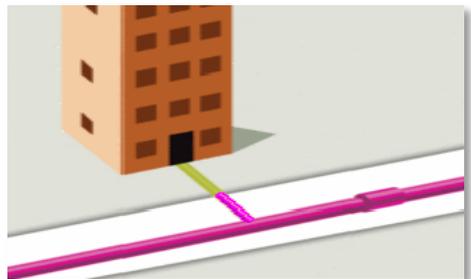
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Flats



How do I know if my property is at risk of sewer flooding?

Each sewerage company keeps a register of the properties in its area that they know have flooded or they believe to be at risk of sewer flooding because of overloaded sewers.

If you own the property, you can ask the company if your property is on the register, and why. The company should also be able to tell you how they plan to remove or reduce the risk of sewer flooding, and when.

What can I do to help protect my property from sewer flooding?

Several things can cause a sewer to flood, including blockages and heavy rainfall.

Blockages can be caused by items such as nappies, wet wipes and cotton buds being flushed down the toilet. Wet wipes may be labelled “flushable” but they may not break down like toilet paper so they can still cause blockages.

Food waste, cooking fats and oils being disposed of down the sink are also a problem. Even if you use washing up liquid and hot water they will eventually solidify and clog up the sewer.

Sewerage companies spend millions of pounds a year clearing these blockages, which is then added to customer bills.

So remember:

- Only pee, poo and toilet paper go down the loo.
- Bag and bin left over cooking oil, fat or grease, nappies, wet wipes and cotton buds.

Disposing of these items appropriately can also reduce blockages in your sink and drains. This will save you the cost of buying drain cleaners or calling out a contractor to clear your drains.

Connect Right



If you are extending your home, building a conservatory or just installing a washing machine, you must make sure that your connection to the drains is correct.

Rainwater should not be allowed to enter a sewer designed to take waste water only. And waste water should not go to a sewer designed only to deal with rain water.

The local planning authority (building control) will be able to give you advice about these matters, which are covered by Building Regulations.

The sewerage company will also be able to provide information about the type of sewers in your area.

More information is available at: www.connectright.org.uk

What should I do if my property is being flooded?

If the problem has been caused by something in your drain, you will need to hire a competent drainage company to clear it.

Check the details of your household insurance policy and immediately report flooding to your insurance company.

If there seems to be a problem with the public sewer, contact the sewerage company straight away. See 'useful contacts' on the back of this leaflet.

The sewerage company will be able to give you useful advice and information. If it is not clear what part of the system is faulty, they will let you know.

Check with your neighbours to see if they are also affected. If they are, make sure they have also contacted the sewerage company.

The more information the company has, the easier it will be to identify the problem and find a solution. Filming or taking photos may also help the sewerage company understand what is causing the flooding.

What will my sewerage company do when flooding occurs?

If sewage has entered your home or garden from a public sewer, the sewerage company should send someone out to visit you as soon as possible. This is usually within 4 hours.

However, the time it takes for the company to respond may be affected by severe storms and whether it is part of a wider flooding problem, for example where a river has burst its banks.

The company's first priority will be to investigate and stop the cause of the flooding. If the flooding is not part of a wider problem, the sewerage company will:

- offer to clean external areas, including disinfecting hard areas, such as patios and driveways
- offer you a rebate on your sewerage charges for the year (see compensation section below)

What will the sewerage company do after flooding?

After sewer flooding has occurred the sewerage company will investigate why the flooding has happened. The company should tell you the result of their investigations and let you know what they are going to do to stop it happening again - and when they will do it by. However, these investigations will take some time.

What types of things can sewerage companies do to prevent sewer flooding?

There are a number of actions that your sewerage company can take to remove or reduce the chances of your property being flooded again.

Some actions are easy and relatively cheap to do but others are both complex and very expensive. We have listed some of these below, starting with the easier actions.

- regular sewer cleaning or jetting
- removing tree roots
- installing a non-return valve
- providing barriers, such as flood gates, special air bricks or covers, flood doors, raised doorsteps.

Long term solutions:

- building bigger sewers or larger pumping stations
- installing storm tanks. These hold rainwater back and release it slowly so sewers are not overloaded.
- Sustainable Drainage Systems or “SUDs”. There is a range of measures that can be taken that may not involve building structures such as storm tanks. These can be ponds, water butts or landscaping. All of these involve keeping rainwater out of the public sewers.

More information on this type of solution can be found at:

<http://www.susdrain.org/>

In some cases there may be more than one solution to a flooding problem. And several organisations may need to work together to solve a flooding problem.

Can I claim compensation?

There is a statutory scheme that says your sewerage company must refund sewerage charges if your property is flooded from its sewers.

Internal Sewer Flooding:

An amount equal to your yearly sewerage bill for each time flooding happens (minimum £150, maximum £1,000).

External Sewer Flooding:

An amount equal to 50% of your yearly sewerage bill (minimum £75, maximum £500).

However, if the flooding was caused by “exceptional weather” the company does not have to make any payment, but some companies do anyway.

Some companies also pay more than the minimum amount. You should contact your sewerage company for details of their compensation scheme.

You will need to claim any losses such as damaged belongings or redecoration costs on your household insurance unless it can be proved that the sewerage company was negligent in some way.

Your household buildings or contents insurance company may also be able to help cover any other costs and provide advice about ways in which you can protect your home.

How do I find out if I am at risk of other types of flooding?

The Environment Agency has developed flood risk maps. You can see if you have been identified as being at flood risk from rivers and the sea, surface water and/or reservoir flooding. To view your risk, visit the Environment Agency’s website.

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency

The section “What’s in My Back Yard” also provides information on which areas are vulnerable to river and coastal flooding, as well as a lot of other useful information.

The Natural Resources Wales website also has a “What’s my Flood Risk?” section.

naturalresourceswales.gov.uk

Who else may be able to help with flooding problems?

The Environment Agency has permissive powers (but not a duty) to carry out flood and coastal risk management work and to regulate the actions of other flood risk management authorities on main rivers and the coast.

The Environment Agency has a 'Floodline': 0845 988 1188 or 0345 988 1188, that gives advice on current flood warnings and deals with general enquiries.

Local councils have powers to carry out work on other watercourses and coastal erosion protection assets, except for watercourses within Internal Drainage Board (IDBs) Districts.

Internal Drainage Boards

Internal Drainage Boards are a local public authority established in areas of special drainage need in England and Wales. They have permissive powers to undertake works to reduce flood risk to people and property and manage water levels to meet local needs.

The Association of Drainage Authorities (ADA) is the national

representative for IDBs in England and Wales.

You can search IDBs areas on their website:

http://www.ada.org.uk/idb_members_map.html

Regional Flood and Coastal Committees (RFCCs)

The RFCC's play an important local role in guiding the Environment Agency's regional flooding investment programmes, as well as providing a forum for raising and allocating local funding and sharing good practice.

All RFCC meetings are locally advertised and the public is welcome to attend.

A map of FRCCs is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regional-flood-and-coastal-committees-map>

Your Local Council is also responsible for:

Highway drainage (gullies and so on). If roadside gullies are blocked and water cannot enter them, contact your local council.

Groundwater: managing and controlling groundwater.

The Highways Agency
Drainage from main roads
(trunk roads).

Landowners

The person who owns the land or property next to a river or other watercourse (known as a riparian owner) is responsible for:

- maintaining the beds and banks of the watercourse
- clearing any obstructions from the channel and the banks

Whilst riparian owners can undertake minor works on main rivers such as cutting back trees and other vegetation and removing in-stream debris and

rubbish without permission from the Environment Agency, more significant work such as removing silt or gravel from water channels, will require EA consent.

More information and advice on other flooding problems is available from:

The National Flood Forum
Tel: 01299 403055
www.nationalfloodforum.org.uk

The “Know Your Flood Risk” website has a free **Flood Recovery Guide** designed to help victims of flooding.
<http://www.knowyourfloodrisk.co.uk/>

Water Company		Emergency Number
	www.anglianwater.co.uk	03457 145 145
	www.dwrcymru.com	0800 085 3968
	www.nwl.co.uk	0800 393 083
	www.stwater.co.uk	0800 783 4444
	www.southwestwater.co.uk	0844 346 2020
	www.southernwater.co.uk	0845 278 0845
	www.thameswater.co.uk	0845 9200 800
	www.unitedutilities.com	0345 672 3723
	www.wessexwater.co.uk	0345 600 4 600
	www.yorkshirewater.com	0345 124 24 24

CONSUMER COUNCIL FOR



Head Office:

Victoria Square House
Victoria Square
Birmingham
B2 4AJ
0121 345 1000

Website: www.ccwater.org.uk
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