



How to avoid blocked drains

Advice for domestic consumers

CONSUMER COUNCIL FOR



Blockages and Sewer Flooding

Thousands of homes across England and Wales suffer disruption and unpleasantness caused by blocked drains and sewer flooding each year. It can be a foul and costly experience, which is easily avoidable.

Three quarters of sewer blockages are caused by people putting items they shouldn't down toilets or drains, and half of sewer flooding incidents are caused by these blockages.

Drainage pipes are usually four inches in diameter and are only designed to carry water, human waste and toilet tissue. When other items are flushed down the toilet they can get lodged in the pipe and build up a blockage.

Blocked drains stop waste water from leaving your property, and when waste water blocks up, it can come out of the toilet or sink and flood your home. Consumers spend millions of pounds every year clearing blockages from household drains.

Flushing inappropriate items down the toilet and sink may also block the public sewer causing sewerage to flood roads and pavements or pollute rivers and streams.

What not to flush

People sometimes put other products down the toilet or sink which can snag in the pipe and cause a blockage. Even items that appear to have the same texture as toilet paper (such as hand wipes) may not break down if flushed down the toilet.

The drains connected to your home are only designed to carry water, human waste and toilet tissue.

Some items which should not be flushed include:

- Cooking fat, oil or grease, which will harden, even if put down the sink with hot water or soap
- Waste food or garden waste
- Nappies and nappy liners
- Sanitary products
- Plastic bags and wrappers
- Needles and syringes
- Old clothing and rags
- Plaster or cement
- Condoms
- Paper handkerchiefs
- Multipurpose wipes
- Cat litter
- Cotton wool, cotton pads and cotton buds
- Paint and paint thinners

It can be very difficult and expensive to remove some of these items because a contractor may have to dig down to the pipe to extract them.

Disposing of items responsibly

- Anything other than toilet paper should be put in the bin.
- Some water companies provide free 'fat traps' to stop fats, oils and greases from getting into the drains. Contact your local water and sewerage company for details.
- Some local councils provide a separate food waste bin, for the disposal of fats, oil and grease.
- Paint and paint thinners should be taken to a rubbish tip or recycling centre.

Water and sewage companies pay to unblock public sewers and remove dangerous chemicals, but the costs are passed on in customers' bills. By disposing of waste responsibly we can all help to keep sewerage bills down.

What to do if you have a blocked drain?

Where is the blockage?

It can be difficult to locate a blockage in a pipe. If your neighbours are also experiencing slow drains or water is backing up, the blockage could be in the public sewer. Call the sewerage company to check. If the sewer is privately owned, or the blockage is in your property's drain pipe, clearing it is the homeowner's responsibility.

If the blockage is in your drains

You will need to hire a drainage contractor to clear it. Check your insurance policies to see if you are covered for blocked drains. If you are a tenant, your landlord may be responsible for clearing a blockage in the pipe.

Do you have shared drains?

Your water and sewerage company can tell you if your property is connected to public or privately owned sewers and give further advice on what can, and cannot be put in toilets, sinks and drains.

Where can I get more advice?

The telephone directory lists contact details for local drainage contractors who can give advice and details of costs in clearing blocked drains. Your local council can give advice on household waste collections in your area, and can clarify which items can be collected for recycling.

The water industry sponsors a website promoting responsible waste disposal:

<http://www.water.org.uk/home/resources-and-links/bagandbin>

Visit www.ccwater.org.uk for more information or call the Consumer Council for Water on 0121 345 1000.

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