



Your local supply, on tap

## Leaks on supply pipes

...and how they  
can affect you



**Fresh water is a precious and finite resource. It's coming under increasing pressure from growing populations, increased water use and the threats of climate change. A leaking pipe can waste a lot of water, which is why we always take it very seriously.**

If a water pipe on your property is leaking, you must repair it as soon as possible. In addition to wasting water, if you have a water meter, a leaking pipe will cost you money.

This booklet provides guidance on how to spot a leak, what to do if you find one and the help we can offer.

# Who is responsible for which pipe?

**We are responsible for:** all the pipes on the mains network, including repairing and replacing them when necessary.

**You are responsible for:** maintaining any water supply pipes located within the boundaries of your property, although we may be able to provide some assistance with this (*see the Leak Repair Scheme section on page 8*).

Because the supply pipes within property boundaries are privately owned, we don't have any information on their location within your property.

Most properties are connected to our network by a pipe that carries water from our mains in the road, to the boundary of the property. It usually runs to an individual property, but sometimes it supplies water to a number of properties.

Once the pipe enters your property boundary it is **your** supply pipe and **your** responsibility. It is connected to the internal stop tap (*usually located in your house or garage*) and to the stop tap that's close to your property boundary (*usually in the footpath*).



It's possible that your supply pipe runs under your neighbour's property and sometimes across private land before entering your property. You can locate the street stop tap by looking for a plastic, steel or cast-iron lid just outside your property.

In situations such as this you are still responsible for the repair and maintenance of the supply pipe.

**If you're still not sure where your responsibility lies, turn over for some examples.**

### Homes with an individual supply pipe

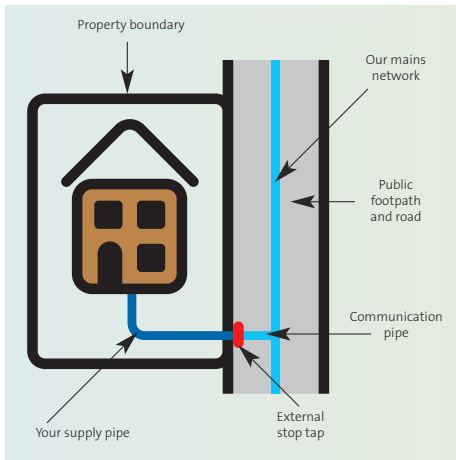
Most properties have an individual supply pipe. If your property has an individual supply pipe, you (or your landlord) are responsible for its upkeep.

### Homes with a shared supply pipe

Some properties share a supply pipe. You and your neighbours can check if yours is shared with your neighbours by turning off the stop tap in the street and seeing which properties are without water. Before doing this, you should alert everyone who might be affected.

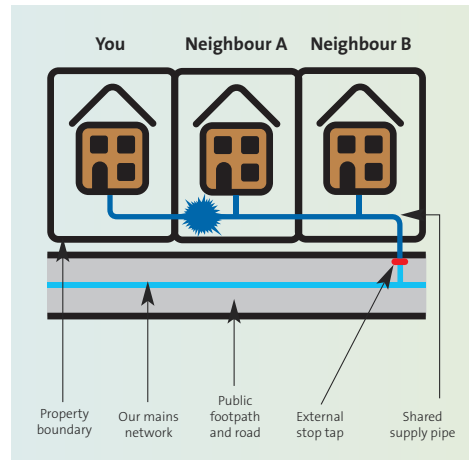
If your home has a shared supply pipe, you share responsibility with your neighbours for its maintenance. If a leak occurs, all the properties beyond it are jointly responsible for repairing the pipe, regardless of whose property the leak is actually on. If the pipe needs to be replaced, all the properties that use it for their water supply are responsible.

### Individual supply pipe



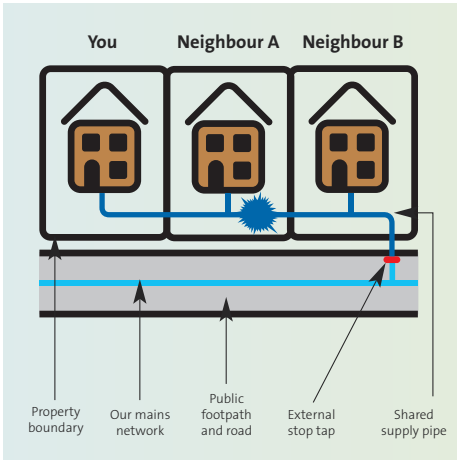
### Example 1:

Only you are responsible for the leak.

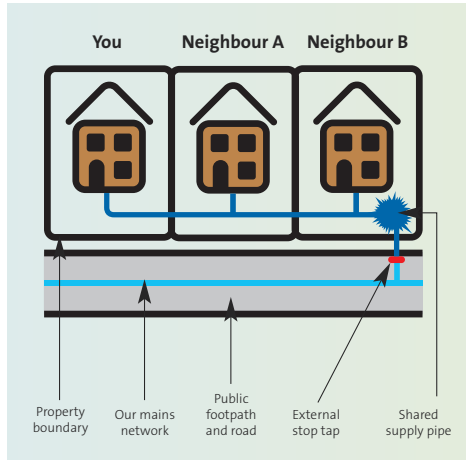


You do have the option to disconnect yourself from the shared supply pipe and to install a separate pipe directly to our mains network.

**Example 2:**  
Both you and neighbour A are responsible for the leak.



**Example 3:**  
All three of you are responsible for the leak.



# How can I check for leaks?

**We constantly monitor all the pipes in our supply network as part of our leak detection programme.**

Whenever we install a new meter, we check for leaks between the meter and the internal stop tap. If we find a leak and it can be repaired without us having to do any extra digging, we'll carry out the work free of charge. If the repair needs further excavation you may be required to pay for it, although you may be eligible for our free Leak Repair Scheme (see page 8).

We aim to read your water meter every six months and will notify you in writing if we suspect a leak. However, it's often very difficult to spot leaks – especially smaller ones – so we greatly value your help in identifying them.

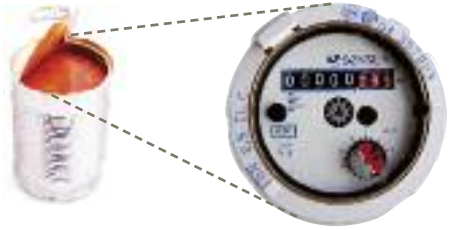


## **Conduct an initial check**

If you suspect that you have a leak, turn all your taps off and listen to your supply pipe. If you can hear water flowing, this may indicate a leak. Additional indications include:

- **Reduced water pressure coming out of your kitchen tap**
- **An unusually lush and possibly long patch of grass in your front garden – especially when the rest of the lawn is dry**
- **A patch of water on your tarmac, particularly on a dry day**
- **An unusually high water meter reading.**

**If you see what you think may be a leaking pipe on your property or anywhere else, please call our Customer Services team on 0845 888 5888.**



### Read the meter

If you have a meter, turn off all the taps in your property – and wait 10 minutes for toilet cisterns and other tanks to finish filling.

Next, find your water meter and check that its unique serial number matches the one on your bill.

Your water meter is usually located either close to the boundary of your property, in your front garden, or in the footpath immediately in front of your property. Sometimes it's located inside your property, in which case it's usually under the kitchen sink or near the stop tap.

An external meter will be housed inside a chamber and will be connected to your water supply pipe at the bottom of the chamber. Lift the outer lid using a wide screwdriver if necessary (*internal meters don't have lids*), remove the polystyrene frost cover (*if necessary*) and pull up the inner meter lid (*if fitted*) to view the meter face.

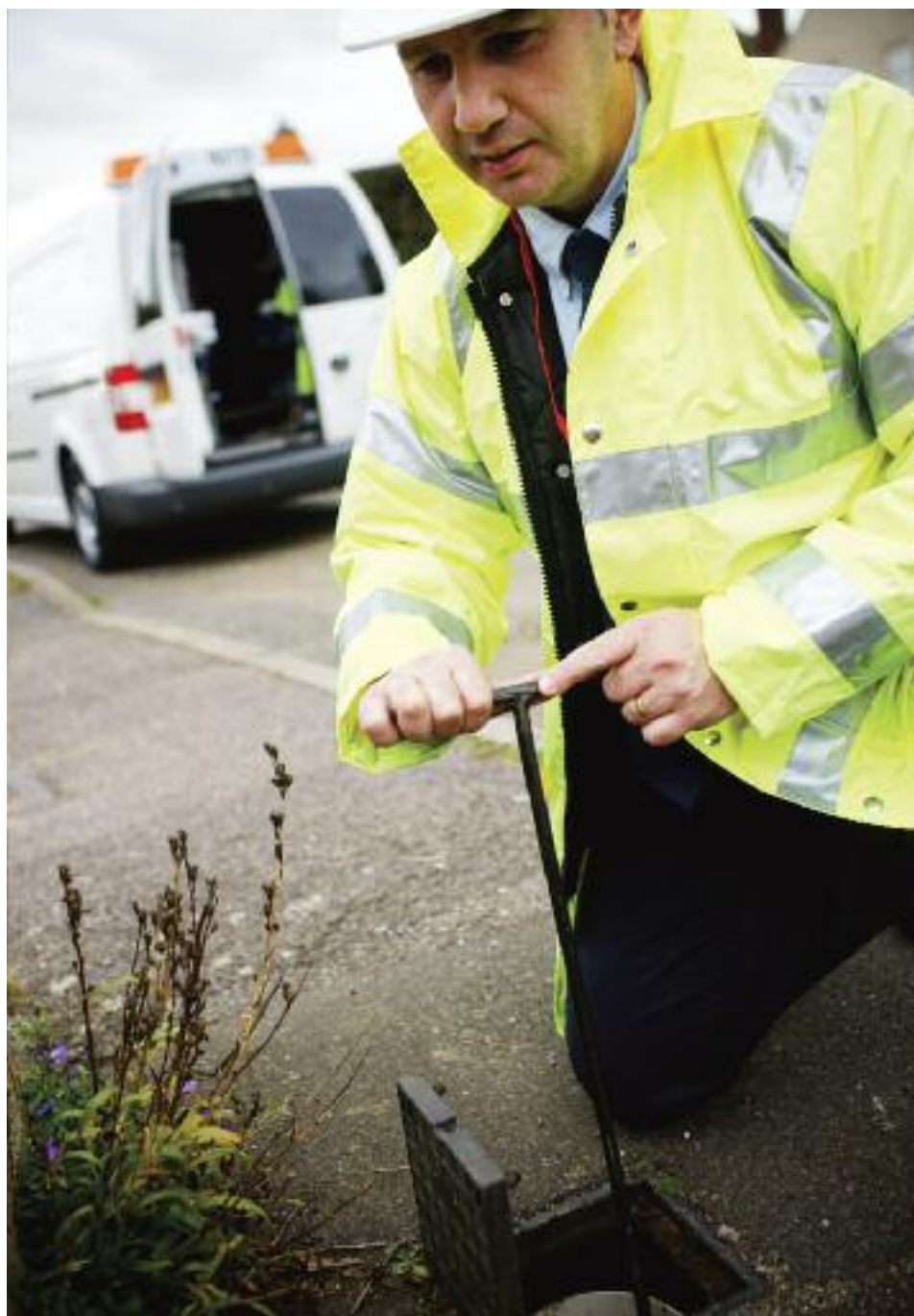
Don't worry if you see water in the chamber, because it's more likely to be the result of rain than a leak. However, if water is still present after a prolonged dry spell, this may indicate a leak, which may have to be checked.

To take a reading, look at the meter face, which is about the size of a tin of baked beans.

Firstly, read the numbers that indicate how many cubic metres of water you have used. The numbers you're looking for will be white on a black background or black on a white background. Now read the dials that are red and white. These indicate how many litres of water you have used. The red and white dials will move quickly when water is being used. There are normally three or four of these dials, although sometimes the fourth one is located separately on the meter face (*it indicates how many tenths of a litre you use*).

You may also see a 'spinner' on the meter face – it's a circular device that spins rapidly when water is used. The spinner could be an arrow, but should not to be confused with the arrow that's sometimes used to record tenths of a litre.

**Read your meter again one hour later. If it has moved forward by more than 5 litres you may have a leak.**





# How does the Leak Repair Scheme work?

If you discover that you have a leaking supply pipe, please contact us as soon as possible.

A Technician will conduct a free assessment of your pipework. Repairing the pipe is your responsibility, but if there is a visible leak and it's generally in good condition, we may decide to repair it free of charge, subject to the conditions listed below. The final decision on what help we give is entirely at our discretion and the scheme may be withdrawn or amended without notice.

- **We can only work on the section of your buried supply pipe between our stop tap and the outside wall of your property**
- **We can't carry out repairs close to, under, or in buildings or other structures, or in rear gardens or side passages where access is difficult. If your pipe runs through a neighbour's property, you'll need to get confirmation from them that we can work on the pipe. We may require this confirmation in writing**
- **We'll do our best to locate the leak. But if we can't find it with a single excavation, you'll have to engage your own plumber to find and repair it, or to replace it. An alternative option would be to consider a replacement through our own subsidised scheme (*subject to conditions*)**
- **This scheme is normally available once per customer**
- **The pipe must be in good condition. If it is in poor condition we will not repair it (*we may make an emergency repair at our discretion*) and will recommend replacement.**

If we decide that we can't repair your supply pipe, we'll advise you of the actions you should take.

For properties that have an internal meter, we are responsible for leaks at or immediately adjacent to the meter installation, so we will repair them free of charge except where caused by your action or negligence.

Our repair or replacement services do not provide 24-hour emergency assistance. So if you have an urgent leak on your supply pipe, you should contact a reputable plumber.

We pride ourselves in always leaving our sites clean, tidy and safe. So after we've finished working, we'll take care to fill in any holes we've created with bare earth or tarmac. However, if we have to dig in an area that is paved or planted, or has any special furnishings, you will have to arrange the permanent reinstatement.

If you are a tenant, you must inform us immediately if you spot a leak and provide us with your landlord's details. Please also advise your landlord that you have done this.

# Should I repair or replace?

If the leak is serious or your supply pipe is old and in a bad condition, you'll need to decide whether to repair or replace the pipework.

**A repair is sometimes the best option if the leak is small and your supply pipe is in good condition. If the pipe is fairly old, it'll probably need to be replaced. We will give more details on our subsidised supply pipe replacement scheme (*subject to conditions*) when our technician visits your property, or when we contact you.**

In the case of a shared supply pipe, the decision to repair or replace will need to be agreed by all the responsible parties.

## **How do I deal with a leak on a shared supply pipe?**

If you and your neighbours decide to replace the shared supply pipe, you must gain approval from everyone whose property is served by it.

When considering whether to replace an old supply pipe, it may be worth your while to have an individual pipe installed.

In general, replacing the shared pipe will be cheaper, but there are some potential problems that you need to be aware of:

- **If the stop tap on the street needs to be closed off, all properties connected to the pipe will be without water**
- **The water use in one property may have an adverse effect on the water pressure in another property (*although good design can often help to avoid this situation*)**
- **It is not possible to add more properties to the existing shared supply.**

If you would prefer to have an individual supply pipe fitted, you'll need to employ a contractor (*see guidelines overleaf*). We will also need to do some work. This will all be at your expense.





You'll need to disconnect your property from the shared supply pipe and lay a new pipe to a point (*previously agreed with us*), at the boundary of your property. Your new pipe may need to cross a neighbour's property, in which case their permission must be obtained. We can offer technical advice on the size of pipe needed.

### What happens if I don't repair the leak?

Wasting water is unacceptable. Once a leak is discovered, we initially ask you to repair within 21 days for single supply and 28 days for shared supplies. Please act promptly otherwise we will have to serve a formal notice and then begin legal action – this will be set out clearly in the notice we send you. If you fail to take the action required in the notice, we will arrange for a contractor to carry out the work. We will then charge you for the work and will add all of our costs to the total.

If the leak is causing a serious risk to property or public health, we may have to turn off your water supply without giving you any notice. However, if this is the case, we will inform you of the steps that need to be taken before your supply can be restored.



**How do I go about finding a contractor?**

Follow these simple guidelines when choosing a contractor to work on your supply pipe:

- **Employ a contractor who has been recommended by a friend or family member**
- **Obtain a written quote for the work and make sure that the work can be completed by the deadline**
- **Use a contractor who is a member of the Water Industry Approved Plumber Scheme (WIAPS) – check the display adverts in your Yellow Pages**  
**This information can also be viewed on the internet site of the Water Regulations Advisory Scheme – [www.wras.co.uk](http://www.wras.co.uk)**



- **The contractor must use a blue polyethylene pipe BS6572, which is available from builders and plumbers merchants. An alternative pipe material, such as copper, may be required in contaminated ground. This pipe should be laid at a minimum depth of 750mm and should be surrounded by a fine material that won't damage it**

- If the leak is located in the part of your pipe that runs into your home to the internal stop tap, we recommend you to replace it and to lay in a duct. The pipe should be insulated and the duct sealed
- We recommend that you get at least three quotations.

**IMPORTANT EARTHING OF ELECTRICAL INSTALLATIONS**

If your property was built before 1966, you may need to replace old metal pipes. Some older systems still rely on the water supply pipe to provide an earth – this is now prohibited. If you believe this may be the case, you will need to contact a qualified electrician to ensure that you have an adequate earth for your electricity supply. Any charges for this work cannot be reimbursed by Affinity Water.

**Is there any extra support available?**

If you are on a water meter, you usually have to pay for water lost from your leaking supply pipe.

However, if you've done everything you can to repair a leak as quickly as possible – and you notify us before you carry out the work – we may amend your bill so that you don't have to pay for the wasted water. We call this a Leak Allowance.

Please note that you won't be eligible for a Leak Allowance if:

- The leak was caused by your negligence
- You took too long to repair it
- You knew about the leak (*because it was visible*) but failed to repair it
- You should have known about the leak and failed to repair it
- We have made a previous allowance for leaks
- We had previously recommended that you replace the pipe but you failed to do so
- Your supply is commercial
- The leak occurred as a result of faulty pipes or fittings in your property.

If we agree to make an adjustment to your bill, our calculation will be based on your previous normal use. If you don't have a record of past consumption, our adjustment will be based on typical use in a property of similar type.

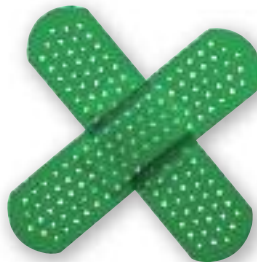
We will not adjust your bill for leaks that have arisen from internal pipework and fittings unless the leak was not visible and you were not aware of it, or if you have claimed for a Leak Allowance before. If you are concerned about further leaks on your supply pipe, or about losing water from internal pipes and fittings, you may wish to investigate taking out insurance to cover the cost of lost water.

**Who can I contact for further information?**

If you would like further information, or would like to discuss any of the points raised in this publication, please call us using the details on the back of this booklet.



Our full Code of Practice for Leaks can be found on our website in the Publications section or sent to you in the post upon request (*see contact details on the back*).



## IMPORTANT INFORMATION



### *Easier reading*

To receive this leaflet in large print, audio or Braille, **please call 0845 888 5888**



### *Leaks*

#### **Have you spotted a leak?**

A leaking pipe wastes a lot of water. This is bad news because water is a precious finite resource and demand for it just keeps growing and growing. If you spot a leak, please call Affinity Water immediately.



### *Be stranger aware!*

It is a sad fact that there are many bogus callers out there who are experts at conning homeowners. They may claim to be 'from the water board', but really they intend to steal cash and property.

**For peace of mind, you might like to register a password with us, to be used by the Affinity Water representative visiting your property.**

**You can arrange this by contacting our Customer Service team (see back page).**

#### **Knock, knock. Who's there?**

Our advice to you is to be vigilant at all times. If someone calls at your door and tells you they are from the water board, don't let them in unless they are in uniform and can show you an Affinity Water identity card. If you are in any doubt, just ask them to wait outside while you call our Customer Services team – don't worry about causing offence, because if they are genuinely from Affinity Water, they will not mind waiting.

# How to get in touch

Please keep  
as a handy  
reminder



**Website:**

[www.affinitywater.co.uk](http://www.affinitywater.co.uk)



**Telephone:**

**0845 888 5888**

Mon-Fri 8am to 6pm Sat 8am to 1pm

*Emergency service operates outside these hours*



**Email:**

[enquiries.southeast@affinitywater.co.uk](mailto:enquiries.southeast@affinitywater.co.uk)



**Post:**

Affinity Water, Tamblin Way, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, AL10 9EZ



**Sewerage emergencies:**

**Southern Water: 0845 272 0845**

[www.southernwater.co.uk](http://www.southernwater.co.uk)

**Consumer Council for Water**

C/O First Floor, Victoria Square House, Victoria Square,  
Birmingham B2 4AJ

Tel: **0207 931 8502** Fax: **0121 345 1010**

Email: [londonandsoutheast@ccwater.org.uk](mailto:londonandsoutheast@ccwater.org.uk)

Mon-Fri 9am to 5pm



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