

Flooding from public sewers

Your guide to our **Floodcare** scheme

*Practical advice
and information
in case of
sewer flooding*



Introduction

Southern Water appreciates that dealing with the impact of sewage flooding is always difficult and we do sympathise with the distress caused by a sewer flooding.

It is essential that you know what to do if your home is threatened by a sewer flooding.

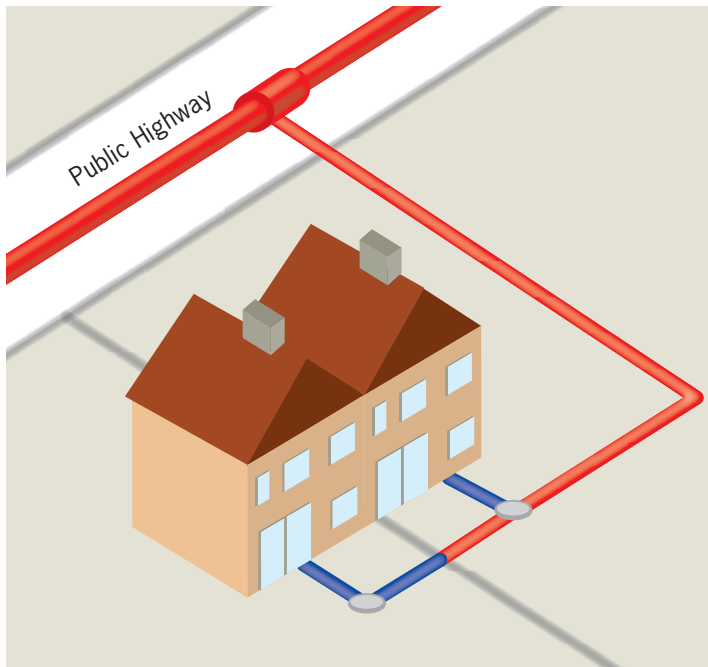
Southern Water has compiled this leaflet to provide practical advice and information. It also sets out the company's

responsibility and commitment to help you, the role of insurance companies and a checklist of actions and contacts.

Whilst we cannot promise that you will never suffer sewage flooding in the future, we do believe that this leaflet can help you deal with the impact of sewage flooding more effectively.

Please take time to read it.

Responsibility for sewerage systems and drains



Key

Private drain:

the first set of pipes taking water away from your property. These then connect to other pipes – private sewers, lateral drains or the public sewer. **Private drains remain the homeowner's responsibility.**

Public sewer:

takes water away for treatment through the sewer network. Owned and maintained by sewerage companies.

This diagram shows the private/public ownership of sewer pipes for semi-detached properties. There are some differences depending on the age and type of property you own, for example if you own a detached property or flat.

For detailed explanations, visit

www.southernwater.co.uk/privatesewers

What to do if you are flooded with sewage?

If the flooding appears to be from the public sewer call us immediately on **0845 278**

0845. If it is a problem with the private drains serving your property you will need to contact a private drainage contractor. If in doubt call us and our specialist advisors will be able to give you advice on what to do.

Do you have any individual needs?

If you or any of your household members have any individual needs, please let us know straight away. This will help us when prioritising a visit to your home by one of our sewage teams. If, for example, you have mobility problems or are visually impaired you may have difficulty leaving your home in complete safety as a result of sewage flooding.

When will someone visit?

Normally we will attend to a complaint of sewer flooding within two hours of notification of wastewater entering a property (internal), and within four hours if flooding is outside a property (external). We will also provide an external clean up service where possible within 12 hours (internal flooding)* and 24 hours (external flooding).

** Specialist cleaning of the property must be arranged through your insurance company.*

Is there a health risk associated with sewage flooding?

Sewage largely consists of water and domestic waste from bathrooms and kitchens. During wet weather it is likely to be highly diluted by rainwater.

You should adopt normal basic hygiene precautions and follow the instructions provided. Fit and healthy people should be resistant to health risks associated with sewage, but if you, or anyone in the household is unwell, has a disability or is elderly or

otherwise vulnerable, it is advised that you avoid any contact with the contaminated area. You should seek advice from your G.P.

- Wear rubber gloves when clearing up, look out for glass, nails, and other sharp objects.
- Always wash your hands thoroughly after exposure.
- Wash and treat footwear with a mild disinfectant
- Keep children and pets out of the contaminated area
- Launder any splashed clothing using a hot wash

In the unlikely event of you feeling unwell, we recommend that you contact your G.P. as a precautionary measure and explain that your property has recently been flooded.

Should I contact my insurers?

It is essential, and in your interest, to contact your household insurance company immediately to inform them of the flooding incident, whether you intend to claim from them or not. This is because Southern Water is not automatically liable for sewage flooding events that are beyond our control and your own insurers can also provide advice as to what actions you will need to take to ensure the terms and conditions of your policy are met.

How will contamination of my house be cleaned up?

Representatives of Southern Water will carry out an initial clean up where possible within 12 hours for internal flooding and 24 hours for external flooding.

We recommend that you contact your insurance company if any further cleansing or replacement of damaged items is necessary. Excess liquid will firstly be removed. A clean up to remove any debris or faecal contamination will follow.

A household disinfectant will then be applied to the contaminated areas.

Independent research by WRc (Water Research Centre) have established that by using the above approach, disinfection will remove all traces of bacteria within 24 to 48 hours.

Before items are removed every effort should be made to contact your insurance company for authorisation.

If any electricity circuit or equipment has been immersed, a qualified electrician will need to check the safety of the system or appliance.

Further clean up measures you can take

It is recommended that only fit and healthy people should undertake clean up activities.

- Remove all soft fittings and furnishings that are damaged beyond repair once your insurance company have inspected the damaged items and agreed to their disposal.
- Remove all dirty water and silt from the property including the space under the floorboards if you have them.
- Wash down all hard surfaces with hot soapy water and allow to dry.
- Use a domestic disinfectant to wash over all hard surfaces after cleaning.
- Food preparation surfaces, storage cupboards, refrigerators etc, should all be washed down with a food safe disinfectant.
- Low level heating and good ventilation will help to speed the drying process.
- Clothing, bedding and other soft fabric articles, including children's toys, should be laundered on a hot wash (minimum 60°C).
- Your local authority will dispose of bulky household furniture items that cannot be salvaged. Please check with your local authority to see if charges apply.

- Wherever possible it is best to keep out of affected rooms until the cleanup is complete, but if you do need to access the affected rooms you are advised to adopt the normal basic hygiene precautions outlined above.

Preventative measures – a self help guide

Whilst Southern Water offers a clean up service to customers who have suffered flooding from one of our sewers, there are some measures you can take now to try and prevent sewage water from entering your property. Also listed are some points you may like to consider to minimise any further losses as a result of sewage flooding.

- Keep a supply of sandbags to use to block driveways, doorways, and airbricks. You can purchase sandbags from your local builders merchants. Please be aware that sandbags will decay over a period of time. It is essential therefore that you regularly inspect and replace any sandbags which have deteriorated.
- Make sure that you know how to turn off your gas and electricity supplies.
- Ensure important documents, treasured and irreplaceable items are kept upstairs or in a high place downstairs.
- Keep medication within easy reach.

How will the contamination of my garden be cleaned up?

Representatives of Southern Water will carry out a clean up. This will be followed by a litter pick of solids and debris.

It is not normal practice to apply disinfectant to gardens as this can kill plants.

However if you feel this would give you extra reassurance then a very mild disinfectant can be applied.

Sunlight contains ultra violet radiation and this is effective in the process of breaking down and killing bacteria. It will take time to remove all traces of bacteria.

If the ground is particularly waterlogged we may decide to leave the clean up for a day or two to avoid disturbing the ground and spreading the contamination.

Hard surfaces such as paths and drives will be cleaned and disinfected. We suggest you keep off these areas for 48 hours to give the disinfectant time to work.

What precautions do I need to take to prevent further contamination of my garden?

As ultra violet light assists the process of reducing bacteria, it is suggested that you leave the area for some time to allow natural degradation to take place.

Our advice is that you should not eat any food or garden produce that has been directly contaminated by the sewage spill. Southern Water can provide you with further advice in circumstances where you may be growing food in your garden or keeping animals.

Hosing the garden is not advised, as this will saturate the ground and may help to prolong the life of the bacteria.

What happens next if my garden has been flooded?

Factors which influence bacteria decay periods include climatic conditions, temperature, vegetation, soil type etc. Independent laboratory tests carried out by WRc show that bacteria should typically reduce to background levels within the following periods:

- Warm, dry, summer conditions 10 days
- Damp, cool, spring/autumn conditions 25 days
- Wet, cold, winter conditions 20 days

The tests found that bacteria survive longer below the surface where ultra violet radiation cannot reach.

Our guaranteed standards of service

Sewer flooding – general

Normally we will respond to a complaint of sewer flooding within two hours of notification of wastewater entering a property (internal) and within four hours if flooding is outside a property (external). We will also provide an external clean up service where possible within 12 hours (internal flooding) or within 24 hours (external flooding).

Sewer flooding – internal and external

If your premises are internally flooded due to a failure of our drainage system, we will compensate you with an amount equivalent to your annual sewerage charges – £150 minimum, up to a maximum of £1,000 for each incident, subject to conditions.

If your property is externally flooded, on receipt of your claim, we will compensate you with an amount equivalent to half your annual sewerage charges – £75 minimum, to a maximum of £500 for each incident. You will need to make a claim within three months of the incident and provide information to prove you were materially affected by the flooding incident – claim form available at:

www.southernwater.co.uk/floodclaim

For more information, please contact our 24-hour Customer Service Centre on **0845 278 0845**.

If you would like any further information please contact:

Customer Service Centre

Southern Water
PO Box 41
Worthing
BN13 3NZ

Please always quote your Customer Number shown at the top of your bill.

All calls to the Customer Service Centre using these numbers will be charged at the local rate.

Service enquiries:

0845 278 0845

Monday – Friday 8am – 7pm;
Saturday 9am – 1pm;
(24 hours for emergencies)

Email: you can email us using the form in the **Contact Us** section of our website

Minicom – for customers who are deaf or hard of hearing:

0845 275 0845

Monday – Friday 8am – 8pm;
Saturday 8am – 5pm



www.southernwater.co.uk

Useful contact information

Having provided contact information for ourselves, and our regulator, the Consumer Council for Water, Southern Water recommends that you enter contact numbers for the following. You may find them very useful in a flooding situation.

Consumer Council for Water
– London and South East:

0845 758 1658

Homeserve:

0800 247 999

Local Authority:

Building Insurance company:

Household Insurance company:

Local Police Station:

Local Fire Station:

Gas company:

Electricity company:

Telephone company: