

# Great water every day, used water taken away



**United  
Utilities**  
*helping life flow smoothly*

**A guide to pipes,  
drains and sewers**

# Going underground

**Most people are used to looking after the pipes inside their home, but never give a moment's thought to the pipes hidden away below ground.**

Beneath your garden, driveway or path there are two rather important pipes that you should be aware of - a water supply pipe, which delivers water to your home from our main in the street, and a sewer pipe, which flushes all your wastewater into our sewers.

Without these two pipes, your taps would be nothing more than ornaments, and your loo...well, probably best not to go there!

Most of the time, these two pipes are quite happy doing their own thing.

If, however, you need to replace or repair one of them, or install a new one because

you've built a new property or extension, you'll need to know the how's, what's and if's - to make sure your project flows smoothly.

This leaflet provides a summary of the steps you need to take. The first half looks at water pipes, and the second half at sewer pipes.

Before you get cracking, you may need to enlist the services of a professional plumber or builder.

Some of the jobs mentioned within this booklet can be quite specialist and we would always recommend any works are carried out by suitably trained professionals.

## Builders' special!

We have a whole host of technical information for builders and plumbers on our website. It covers pipe laying, materials, ducting, legislation and lots of other specialist issues.



You can find all this good stuff here: **[unitedutilities.com/builders-developers](http://unitedutilities.com/builders-developers)**



# Water pipes:

## A word about your water supply pipe

### Using your meter to check for leaks

If you have a meter, you can use this to check for leaks.

**STEP 1:** Turn off all taps and appliances which use water.

**STEP 2:** Wait 30 minutes, then take a meter reading (including the red digits).

**STEP 3:** Don't use any water for a further hour, then take another meter reading. Ideally, the longer you can wait between the two meter reads the better (for example, overnight if this is possible), as some leaks are very small and it takes a longer period of time for the meter to record the water being wasted.

**STEP 4:** Compare the two readings. Have they changed? If so, you could have a leak.

\*Water mains are typically laid in streets. We're responsible for the part of the pipe which connects to the water main in the street. The situation may be different for example where your property is in a rural location and is supplied by a water supply pipe laid in private land. In these situations you will need to investigate the location of the supply pipe and who is responsible for its maintenance.

**It's a little miracle every day. You turn on the tap, and out flows clear, pure drinking water.**

Without your water supply pipe, you'd soon be left high and dry.

This underground pipe connects your home to our network. And you (or your landlord) are responsible for looking after it - from your home, right up to your property boundary. United Utilities is responsible for the pipe once it crosses your property boundary and connects to the water main in the street.\*

Depending on the type of property you live in, you may have a supply pipe

of your very own, or you may share one with your neighbours – in which case, decisions about the pipe have to be made jointly.

If there's a leak on your supply pipe, it will probably be down to you. However, in certain cases we may be able to make a free, one-off repair, in the interests of not wasting water.

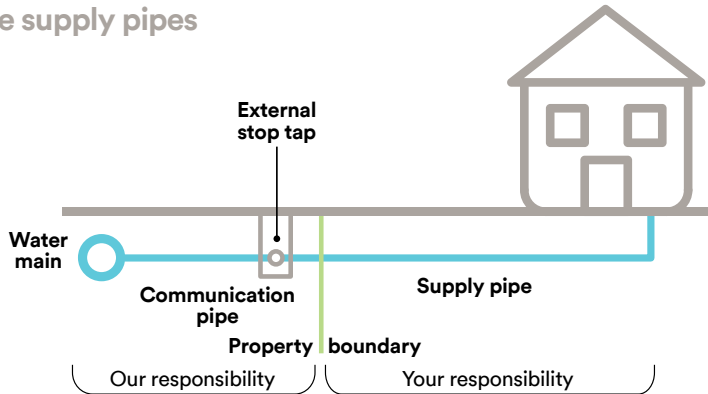
For more information on repairs, visit [unitedutilities.com/bursthome](https://www.unitedutilities.com/bursthome) or call us on **0345 672 3723** and we'll do our best to help.

### Get winterwise and prevent bursts

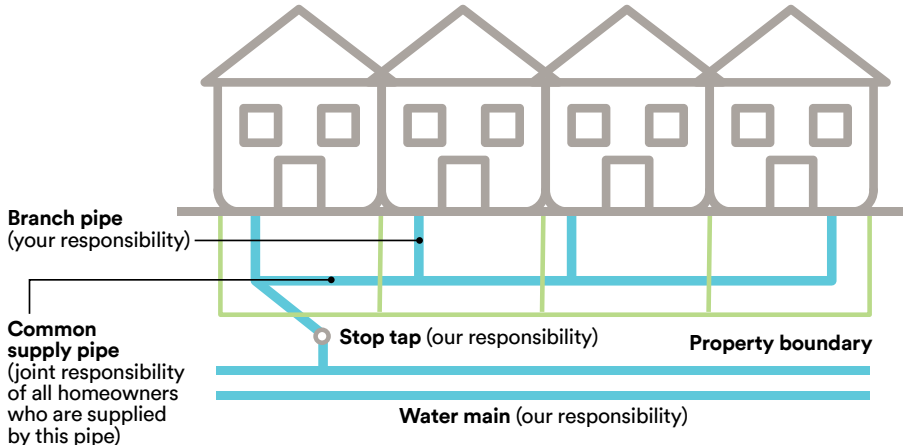
When the temperatures plummet below zero, the water pipes in your home are at risk of freezing. Lagging pipes in cold places, and keeping your heating on a low level, can make all the difference.

It's also a great idea to find out where your stop tap is (usually under the kitchen sink) and to have the name of a decent plumber to hand, so that if there is a pipe emergency, you can swing into action at a moment's notice. For advice, visit: [unitedutilities.com/winterwise](https://www.unitedutilities.com/winterwise)

## Single supply pipes



## Common supply pipes



## Who's responsible?

The diagrams opposite show both our responsibility and yours, for the water pipes that supply your home.

When a single property is supplied by a supply pipe (top left), the pipe is your responsibility when it crosses your property boundary.

When more than one property is supplied by a common supply pipe (bottom left), the responsibility for this pipe is shared by all the properties supplied by it. The individual branch pipes that supply water to your home are also your responsibility.

If there's a leak on the supply pipe, it's usually down to you to get it fixed. However, we will, in certain cases, repair a leak on this pipe free of charge. Full details can be found at [unitedutilities.com/bursthme](https://www.unitedutilities.com/bursthme)

Occasionally, we may have to insist on replacing a common supply pipe serving several properties, with separate pipes for each home. We may do this if the common pipe is in a bad state, if some of the properties have been converted into flats, or if one of the households has persistent problems paying their bill.

# Water pipes:

## Replacing lead supply pipes

**If you live in a property built before 1970, there's a chance that your water supply pipe is made from lead.**

These days, lead pipes are no longer used for health reasons, as small traces of the metal can get dissolved in your tap water. Medical experts believe this can be harmful, especially to young children and unborn babies.

If you want to replace a lead supply pipe, it's down to your builder or plumber to lay a new pipe. We'll then inspect your plumber's handiwork. If it's up to scratch, we'll connect the new pipe to our network,

free of charge, and replace any remaining lead on our side of the garden fence.

For lots more information about replacing lead pipes, plus an online application form to get your replacement pipe connected, visit [unitedutilities.com/lead-pipes](https://www.unitedutilities.com/lead-pipes)

We would always recommend choosing a water industry-approved plumber when replacing your lead pipes. Visit [watersafe.org.uk](https://www.watersafe.org.uk) for full details.

## Believe it or not...

**Removing a lead pipe could leave your home unsafe if there's an electrical fault.**

In the past, lead pipes were often used as an electrical earth. If you're replacing your supply pipe, do seek advice from an electrician first.

## How to be a lead detective

Grab a torch and look for the pipe that runs from outside to your kitchen tap, by peering in and behind your cupboards. Found it?

Lead pipes are pretty distinctive. They are dark grey (underneath any paint), soft, and easily marked.

**Remember, even if the rest of your pipes are made from copper, your supply pipe could still be lead.**



A person wearing a light blue and white vertically striped button-down shirt and blue jeans is filling a blue plastic container with water from a kitchen tap. The water is splashing into the container. The background is a blurred green wall.

## Water pressure

We must supply water at a sufficient pressure so that you can fill a 4.5 litre container in 30 seconds.

Pressure and flow rates in your home can be affected by a number of factors, including:

- the height of the property above the water main in the street, and its height in relation to the reservoir
- the condition and layout of your water supply pipe
- whether the property shares a water supply pipe with other properties
- peak demand conditions
- the plumbing inside your home,

If you think you have a problem with your water pressure, first check the plumbing inside your home and check that the internal stop tap is fully open. If you have access to the internet please visit [unitedutilities.com/low-water-pressure](https://www.unitedutilities.com/low-water-pressure) where you will find a useful interactive step-by-step guide to help you identify why you may be experiencing low water pressure in your home. If you still need to speak to us after visiting the website, please call **0345 672 3723**.

# Water pipes:

## Making a new water connection

If you're moving into a new house, it's likely that your builder will have already made arrangements with us to connect your home to our water mains.

However, if you've built a new property or extension that needs a water supply, you may want to arrange this yourself.

The process can get fairly technical, but in a nutshell, it's down to you to lay the supply pipe, and us to do the rest. An experienced and accredited builder should already know all the technical and legal requirements.

If you need any advice please contact our team on **0345 072 6067**.

We also have lots of information on our website at **[unitedutilities.com/builders-developers](http://unitedutilities.com/builders-developers)** including all the forms you will need to complete and send back to us.



## Wait a mo... did you know?

- Plumbing in all new properties has to meet certain legal regulations, before we can connect them. These are set out in the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999.
- If you need us to install a new public water main, we'll normally provide this within three months of you agreeing to our terms.
- You don't have to use United Utilities to install your water main or supply pipe. You can use any accredited self-lay organisation. More details can be found at **[unitedutilities.com/builders-developers](http://unitedutilities.com/builders-developers)**
- Sometimes it's helpful to see the position of existing water mains and sewers. You can arrange to view or purchase copies of our maps by calling **0370 751 0101**.



# Sewer pipes:

## Making sense of sewer pipes

**Whenever you flush the loo, take a shower or use the dishwasher, the used water disappears round the U-bend, never to be seen again.**

It leaves your property via a private drain which serves only you and is your responsibility to look after.

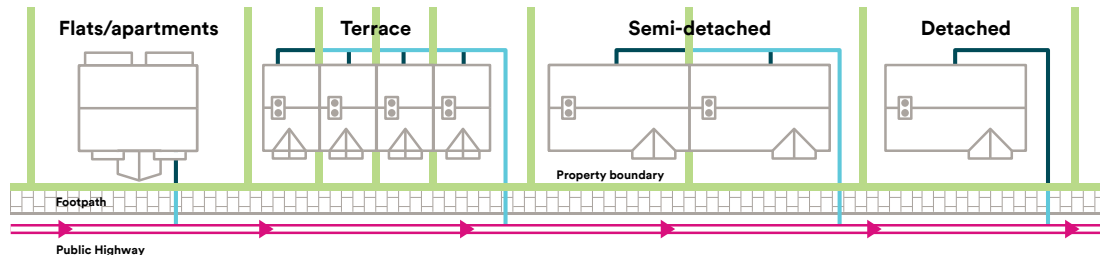
At the point your drain connects into a pipe which serves more than one property, or the drain runs beyond your property boundary, we become responsible for it.

The illustration below shows you how this may work.

- In the event of a blockage, if it happens:
- within your own private drain you will need to arrange to get it fixed
  - within a sewer pipe serving more than one property or it's outside your property boundary we will take care of it.

For further information please call us on **0345 672 3723**.

### Typical sewer pipe responsibility



#### Key

- Private drain (responsibility of home owner)
- Shared sewer pipe /pipe beyond the property boundary (responsibility of United Utilities if the property was constructed and connected to the public sewer prior to 1st July 2011)
- Public sewer (responsibility of United Utilities)

Illustration provided for guidance only.

# Sewer pipes:

## Making a new sewer connection

If you're in the process of building a new property or extension that will require a connection to the public sewer, you'll need written permission from us before you're allowed to do this.

It's important that you apply for a sewer connection once you've obtained planning permission (or within 12 months of when you intend to connect to our sewer system if planning permission is not required). Please note that we do not provide an installation service and you will need to appoint your own contractor to do this work.

Once you've received written approval from us, your contractor or builder must also apply for permission to carry out the work. We will assess this application to make sure that anybody working on the public sewer is appropriately qualified and can carry out the work safely and to high standards.

We have a section on our website which explains this process in greater detail, together with all the documentation needed to apply. Please visit [unitedutilities.com/builders-developers](https://unitedutilities.com/builders-developers)

The most common problem with new connections happens when a property has separate pipes for foul water (e.g. from your loo and household appliances) and for rainwater. It's vitally important that these two pipes are connected to the right bits of our public sewer network.

Cross-connections can cause issues such as pollution – and could land you with a big fine. For further information please visit [unitedutilities.com/preventing-water-pollution-from-your-home](https://unitedutilities.com/preventing-water-pollution-from-your-home)

## Think before you flush

It may be tempting to flush items such as cotton buds or baby wipes down the loo, but they can come back to haunt you!

These items don't break down like toilet tissue, so they can block your sewer pipe, resulting in overflowing loos, big plumbing bills, and a whole lot of mess.

To find out more about how to be kind to your sewer pipe, visit: [unitedutilities.com/thinkbeforeyouflush](https://unitedutilities.com/thinkbeforeyouflush)

# Private pumping stations:

## All you need to know

You may be one of those (relatively few) people with a private pumping station on your land or near your home. They often look like small electrical control panels (see pics) and are located close to manhole covers. They can sometimes be found inside garages too and help to pump wastewater away from properties and into our main public sewers.

Back in October 2016, Government legislation relating to private pumping stations changed. From that date, if a private pumping station served two or more properties (or one property when it is situated beyond the property boundary), then ownership of it transferred to us. This means we are responsible for all ongoing maintenance and repairs.

There are around 2,000 private pumping stations across the North West, and it's important we know where they are all located. If you think you may have a private pumping station within or just outside your property, please let us know by calling **0345 672 3723**.



## Other leaflets that may be of interest:

This leaflet is one in a series of publications containing useful information for our customers. Others that may be of interest to you are:

- **A guide to paying your water bill**
- **Water meter application pack**
- **Testing your household water meter**
- **A simple guide to your water meter**
- **A guide to our Priority Services**
- **A guide to using water wisely**
- **WaterSure application pack**
- **Our complaints procedure**
- **Replacing lead and common supply pipes**
- **Our standards of service**

You can download any of our leaflets from our website: [unitedutilities.com/leaflets](https://unitedutilities.com/leaflets), or write to: **United Utilities, PO Box 459, Warrington WA55 1WB.**

## My Account

Register for My Account and you can go online to pay your bill, tell us you've moved, give a meter reading and go paperless.

Visit [unitedutilities.com/myaccount](https://unitedutilities.com/myaccount)



## In case you need to contact us:



### To talk to us about your bill:

**0345 672 2888 if you don't have a water meter**

**0345 672 2999 if you have a water meter**

For opening hours please visit [unitedutilities.com/contactus](https://unitedutilities.com/contactus) where you can also get in touch with us online.

### To talk to us about your water and wastewater services:

**0345 672 3723**

Opening hours: for emergencies we are open 24 hours.

You can also call this number to check the identity of one of our representatives.

If you have hearing or speech difficulties, and use a textphone, please dial **18001** followed by the number you require.



### You can write to us at:

**United Utilities, PO Box 459, Warrington WA55 1WB**



### Or go online:

Visit our website and click on '**Live chat**' to webchat with a member of our team or go to [unitedutilities.com/contactus](https://unitedutilities.com/contactus)

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