

# sewage flooding



What to do if your home or property is flooded with sewage

*Wessex  
Water*

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

*a YTL company*



## Introduction

Having your home or property flooded by sewage can be a particularly unpleasant and distressing experience.

Fortunately, only a small number of properties within the Wessex Water region are affected each year and we are carrying out improvements to reduce the problem still further.

For those affected by flooding from the public sewer, Wessex Water is able to help and, where appropriate, to pay compensation. This will be additional to any claim you make on your own household insurance policy.

Inside this leaflet you will find information about:

- what causes sewer flooding
- whose responsibility it is when flooding occurs
- who to contact if your property is flooded with sewage
- what steps you should take if your property is flooded
- how Wessex Water will help you and, if appropriate, compensate you
- how to claim for flooding damage to your property or contents
- how you can help to prevent sewer flooding.

If, having read this leaflet, you have any questions please contact customer services on 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm; emergency enquiries at all other times).

If your property has been flooded with sewage – either internally or externally – ring our Sewage Floodline on 0845 850 5 959 (24 hours) as soon as possible.

## What causes sewer flooding?

Our sewers are designed to take away sewage from properties and in some cases surface water which runs off roads, footpaths and paved areas.

While our sewerage system can cope with day to day flows, exceptional weather can overwhelm it and cause flooding. Blockages in a sewer or the failure of a pumping station can also result in flooding.

In the event of a sewer flooding, your property could be affected both internally and externally. Internal flooding is less common and can be caused when the system backs up through the internal drains or toilet inside your property.

## Whose responsibility is it?

If the flooding is caused by a blockage in a public sewer, Wessex Water will arrange for the blockage to be cleared at our cost. If exceptional weather has caused the public sewer to flood then we will clean up and assess whether any remedial work can be carried out.

If the flooding is caused by a problem in your private drain, you will be responsible. Your private drain is the section of pipe which serves just your property and is within your boundary.

Whatever the cause, it can be costly to rectify any damage. This is why most household insurance policies cover these exceptional circumstances. We recommend you check that you have a household insurance policy that covers sewage flooding.

## Who to contact

If sewage from a public sewer floods your property you should contact our Sewage Floodline immediately on:

**0845 850 5 959**

*(24 hours; all calls are charged at the local rate)*

It is particularly important that you contact us when a flooding event occurs. This helps us to set our priorities and ensure that the risk of flooding is removed as soon as possible.

If you or someone in your home has any additional needs such as mobility problems or disability then please let us know when you call.

You should also contact your household insurance company immediately. Any claims for loss or damage must be directed to them. They will provide advice as to the actions you will need to take to ensure the terms and conditions of your policy are met.

If the flooding is due to a problem with your private drain and you are insured for such incidents, we would recommend you contact your insurance company. If you are not insured, you are advised to contact a private drainage contractor. We can provide the names of contractors we use to clear blockages on our public systems. A list of local drainage contractors can also be found in local telephone directories or online.

If in doubt call us and we will be able to give you advice on what to do.

For independent advice, please contact your local council's environmental health team.



## What will we do if your property is flooded?

Under our Wessex Water Promise we aim to respond to all sewage flooding incidents within:

- two hours of a first report of internal flooding
- four hours of a first report of external flooding.

During severe weather we may take a little longer and we may need to respond to internal flooding incidents before external flooding incidents but we will do our best to keep you informed about when we will get to your property.

We will also provide a clean up service where possible, within 12 hours where your property is flooded internally and 24 hours externally. This service is free of charge.

For internal flooding we will help with removal of litter as well as disinfection of the affected area and drying. Once thoroughly dried, the affected area can be used.

We usually do this when we first respond to the incident but in busy periods we may need to complete the clean up the following day. We may also ask specialists to help us to clean up.

It is important that you check with your insurance company before removing any furniture. It may want you to keep any affected items for examination by a loss adjuster. You may want to record the details of the damage with photographs or on video.

For external flooding we will clear affected areas of sewage debris where conditions allow. You should restrict the use of the affected areas until the clean up is completed.

We will disinfect hard surfaces such as paths, patios and drives, but recommend you keep off these areas until they are dry or until the following day.

It is not normal practice to disinfect lawns and borders as this can kill plants and do more harm than good. We may need to return to clean up these areas thoroughly when the ground and any remaining debris has dried out. We may replace turf, gravel or other garden surfaces if necessary. As most contaminants are on or near the surface, they will be exposed to the sun's ultraviolet radiation which is very effective in killing bacteria.

Use of affected areas of lawn, borders or gravel should be restricted for sufficient time to allow the sewage to decay naturally. This will usually be for one month,

but may differ depending on individual circumstances. We will advise you of the timescale when we do the clean up. If access to the area is essential, this is possible as long as appropriate precautions are taken and again we can advise you of these.

## What steps should you take if your property is flooded

### health and safety tips

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

If you adopt normal basic hygiene precautions and follow the instructions provided you are unlikely to be at any increased health risk if your property is flooded with sewage:

- avoid contact with sewage wherever possible
- wear protective clothing and protect any cuts and grazes with waterproof dressings
- always wash your hands after any exposure and wash and treat footwear with a mild disinfectant
- keep children and pets out of the contaminated area

- dispose of any vegetables or fruit growing in your garden if it is flooded – *crops intended for human consumption should not be planted in affected areas for at least six months from the date of the incident. In the following six months, such crops may be planted, provided they are not harvested until 12 months after the incident.*

Remember, you must contact a doctor immediately if you swallow any contaminated material or if you suffer vomiting or diarrhoea following a flooding incident.

There are also some other steps you should take:

- if your gas meter or any gas appliance has been submerged contact the National Gas emergency services on 0800 111 999 before switching on the gas or lighting any appliance
- if your electricity meter, fuse box or any electrical appliance or socket has been submerged, contact your electricity supplier for advice before using any electrical equipment
- ensure your home or outbuilding is well ventilated by leaving windows open as much as possible. Airbricks to any under floor spaces should be unblocked to ensure a free flow of air.

## Compensation

If your property has been flooded internally you will automatically receive an amount equivalent to your annual sewerage charges (or £150, whichever is the greater).

If you experience internal flooding, we will write to you within five working days with your payment and inform you of the action we intend to take and any investigations we intend to make.

Within one month of the flooding incident, we will write to you to update you on our investigation into the incident and the next steps we will take.

In each case of external flooding you can claim automatic compensation equivalent to 50% of your annual sewerage charges (or £75, whichever is the greater) – subject to a maximum of £500 in one year.

You cannot claim an automatic payment if:

- the flooding happened because of exceptional weather conditions or industrial action
- the flooding was caused by your actions or any defect, blockage or inadequacy of private drainage, council or highway drains
- you notified us more than three months after your property was flooded.

## How to claim for flooding damage to your property or contents

As we have no control over what is put into public sewers or excessive rainfall that can overwhelm the sewerage system, we have no legal liability for damage caused by sewage flooding. The exception is where we have been negligent.

Sewage flooding damage to your property or contents is covered by most household insurance policies – you should contact your insurance company immediately to tell it about the flooding incident. Any claims must be directed to them.

It is in your interest to contact your insurers and let them handle any claim. If you check your policy you'll most likely find that it provides cover on a 'new for old' basis whereas any liability claim proved against us would be paid taking into account wear and tear.

Also reimbursement from your insurer is provided irrespective of whether anyone is to blame for the event. If your insurance company shows we've been negligent, they will claim the costs back from us as appropriate. Failure to notify your insurance company could jeopardise any future insurance claim.

If you don't have insurance due to financial hardship, or you have uninsured losses, we will consider an ex-gratia payment on receipt of details of your claim along with any bills or repair estimates.

You must also provide a letter from your insurers stating that your policy does not cover sewage flooding, or written confirmation that you are not insured. These should be sent to our insurance department at the

address given at the back of this leaflet.

If you are making a claim, do not dispose of any damaged items as we may wish to inspect them. If we need to visit, we will make an appointment that is convenient for you.

When we have assessed your claim, we will write to you with details of any payment or to explain why we do not intend making a payment.



## Don't flush it, bin it

You could help reduce the likelihood of sewage flooding incidents by not flushing disposable products such as wet wipes, sanitary products or cotton buds down the toilet.

Your toilet is not designed to cope with anything other than human waste and toilet paper and shouldn't be used as a bin. Disposable products are among the many items which cause thousands of nasty blockages in sewers every year.

As well as causing nasty smells in gardens across our region blockages can cause flooding, which can, and does, back up into people's homes.

To prevent nasty blockages always put the following items in the bin, not down the toilet:

- Wet wipes and so called 'flushable' wipes
- Cotton buds
- Tampons and sanitary products
- Nappies
- Condoms
- Dental floss
- Bandages

Razor blades, syringes, needles and medicines should also not be flushed, but should be disposed of responsibly.

## Wrap up your fat

Fat, oil and grease are other major causes of blockages in the sewer network.

Instead of pouring it down the sink, wait until it is cool and then pour it into a non-recyclable container and dispose of it with other household waste.

Some fat will solidify, but some will remain a liquid. In this case make sure the liquid is put in a sealable pot, or alternatively absorbed by kitchen towels or newspaper.

Don't use food macerators. Not only do they waste drinking water, but they also lead to drain blockages as the fat can congeal further downstream.

Follow these simple rules to avoid blockages:

- Do not put fat, oil or grease down the sink.
- Do not use hot water or bicarbonate of soda to rinse grease down the sink – it does not stop blockages.
- Do not put scrapings down the sink.
- Do not rinse plates with food scraps in the sink.

Instead, wait for the fat to cool before putting it into a non-recyclable container, or wrapping it up and disposing of it with your food waste, or normal household waste.

For more information about how to prevent sewer blockages visit [www.wessexwater.co.uk/binit](http://www.wessexwater.co.uk/binit)



## *Fat disposal*

Fat, oil and grease is easy to pour down the drain when hot, but can quickly cool and solidify.

Solidified fat is one of the biggest causes of blocked sinks and can lead to blockages in our sewers.

# How to contact us

Sewage Floodline: **0845 850 5 959** (24 hours)

Customer services: **0845 600 4 600**

Minicom number: **0845 730 0619**

(Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm, emergency enquiries at all other times)

For non urgent correspondence or to claim an external flooding payment, please:

email [operational.enquiries@wessexwater.co.uk](mailto:operational.enquiries@wessexwater.co.uk)

or write to: Operational customer services  
Wessex Water  
Claverton Down  
Bath  
BA2 7WW

To ensure that we deliver a good service to all our customers, telephone conversations may be recorded.

This leaflet is also available in large print or braille.

