Introduction

Wessex Water supplies water to customers in the south west of England, including Dorset, Somerset and most of Wiltshire.

Although water is one of the world’s natural resources and falls, quite literally, from the sky, the job of collecting it and then making it clean and safe to drink involves specialist technology.

Water is a precious resource which it is sometimes easy to take for granted.

Wessex Water is committed to meeting future demands for water without restrictions or adversely affecting the environment. We aim to achieve this by:

• developing our distribution network to improve connections between areas of surplus water and areas of potential deficit
• encouraging and enabling our customers to use water wisely
• controlling leakage
• protecting our water sources from pollution, especially nitrates.

The Wessex Water region

[Map of the Wessex Water region with key]

Key
- Water supply and sewage services area
- Sewage services only
- Water supply services only
Water sources

Groundwater sources in Wiltshire and Dorset provide 75% of the water supplied by Wessex Water.

Rainwater permeates rocks, such as chalk, limestone and sandstone, and collects in natural, underground reservoirs known as aquifers.

To abstract this water, boreholes are sunk as far as 120 metres into the rocks.

Water is pumped to the surface, treated and distributed to customers.

Borehole water is usually free of the impurities found in other water sources so it needs less treatment.

It is injected with a solution of chlorine gas to kill off any bacteria and is sometimes aerated to replace carbon dioxide with oxygen.

The remaining water comes from 12 surface water reservoirs, fed by streams and rivers. These are mostly located in hilly areas in Somerset where the geology is suitable for such water infrastructure.

Water treatment

Water from reservoirs needs a higher level of treatment than groundwater. A number of different processes can be used to purify water to the high quality required by law.

The most common methods used are coagulation, followed by dissolved air flotation (DAF) and/or sand filtration.

With both methods the water arriving at a treatment works flows through fine screens to remove algae, insects and any other objects.

Coagulation

A small amount of chemical coagulant is added to help bind together any impurities so that they stick together and can be trapped on the sand filters, which are cleaned regularly.

Dissolved air flotation

After coagulation water is fed into a chamber. Air is forced up through the water pushing the particles to the surface where they are then removed.

Sand filtration

Water flows into fine sand filter beds which trap any remaining particles. In some cases water is passed to other filters, such as carbon, for further cleaning. If necessary alkali such as lime is added to stabilise the water.

Disinfection

The filtered water is treated with chlorine to kill any germs.
Chlorine
Chlorine is used to treat water to ensure it is safe to drink. Most people do not notice a taste or smell of chlorine at the levels found in water. However, some, who are particularly sensitive, are able to detect it. The taste of chlorine can be removed safely using a water filter – as long as the manufacturer’s instructions on cleaning and maintenance are followed. If you do filter water, remember to drink it soon afterwards as it will not remain fresh for long. It can be stored temporarily in a covered container in the refrigerator.

Our leaflet Water quality – the facts provides more information about the range of trace substances that are naturally found in drinking water. For a free copy call 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).

Lead pipes
If you have an older property and water is supplied by lead pipes it may be possible for lead to be present in the water supply, which could have health implications. We have a policy of replacing lead company pipes and encourage our customers to replace any lead pipes that they own. Under our Wessex Water Promise, if you are replacing your lead supply pipe, we will replace our section at the same time free of charge on a like for like basis, providing you give us 15 working days’ notice. If we fail to do so, you can claim a no quibble payment of £35.

If you are thinking about replacing your lead service pipe, you may be eligible for a grant from your local council for part or all of the cost. You should ask for more information from your local council’s housing department.

Where requested we will carry out a free check for lead in your water supply and sample your property within five working days.

For further details call 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).

Rusted pipes
Iron pipes can rust which may result in discoloured water or restricted flow. If this occurs and is due to our pipework we would renew our part of the pipe and recommend you replace the section that you are responsible for.

Water hardness
Around 80% of the water in the Wessex Water region comes from deep underground boreholes and springs. Water from these sources is generally hard, having percolated slowly through the overlying layers of soil and rock, dissolving calcium and magnesium salts on the way. The remaining 20% comes from surface water – mainly from reservoirs which store water running off the surrounding land. The hardness of this run-off will also depend upon the type of soil and rock present in the collecting grounds.

Hard water can lead to scale which although harmless can form in kettles or hot water systems.

Water softeners chemically remove the hardness from water, preventing a build up of scale in the domestic hot water system.

If you have a water softener, it is important to follow the manufacturer’s instructions and to keep an unsoftened cold water supply for drinking and cooking.

You may need to know the hardness of your water to set the softening control correctly on a dishwasher.

To find out the level of water hardness in your area visit ‘Your local area’ section on our website www.wessexwater.co.uk or call 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).
Water quality

Because Wessex Water's services are vital to public health, quality is extremely important.

We carry out more than 250,000 tests on drinking water every year. We operate to strict quality assurance systems and our water production process has been awarded the internationally recognised quality assurance standard ISO 9001:2000.

We are required to ensure that drinking water we supply meets standards set down in national legislation, mainly the Water Supply (water quality) Regulations 2000 as amended.

As a safeguard all our water treatment works are fitted with automatic shutdown facilities.

Our investment has focused on improving the quality of water still further and falls into four principal areas:

- working with farmers as part of our catchment management programme to address the issue of rising nitrates at source
- taking action to protect raw water sources. For example, to control the risk of the waterborne organism, cryptosporidium
- meeting the lead standards set by the EU
- upgrading or replacing water treatment works to address taste, odour and pesticide problems.

Should you have a complaint about water quality, we will contact you within two working hours of receiving that complaint, provided we have a contact telephone number. However, if your complaint relates to water discoloration, hardness or chlorine taste, we will contact you within one working day.

We will sample the water within three working hours of a serious problem with water quality and will inform you of the results by phone within 60 hours of sampling, provided you have given us a contact telephone number. We will provide written confirmation of the results, if required by you, within a further five working days.

If you are concerned about water quality or would like to request a free copy of the water quality report for your supply area call 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am – 6pm) or email operational.enquiries@wessexwater.co.uk giving your name, address and postcode. We will provide the report within seven working days from the date we receive the request. Alternatively visit www.wessexwater.co.uk and click ‘Your local area’ for water quality and hardness where you live.

Our water network

An extensive and complex network of water mains ensures water is on tap 365 days of the year, 24 hours a day.

Treated water is held in storage tanks, known as service reservoirs. Usually hidden underground, or sometimes as water towers, these reservoirs vary in size depending on the area they serve.

Water is pumped into these reservoirs at a constant rate but its outflow varies to meet changing demands throughout the day and night.

Usually water flows from the service reservoirs to customers’ homes by gravity. In some cases it has to be pumped to ensure it reaches every property. Water leaves service reservoirs through trunk mains. These are large diameter pipes capable of moving large amounts of water around the area quickly.

From the trunk mains, water flows into smaller pipes, known as distribution pipes. These become progressively smaller. Attached to the distribution mains are service connections which are narrow pipes carrying water into individual homes.

Water supply interruptions

We have a duty to provide sufficient water supply for domestic needs. However, if we identify water is unfit to drink we will issue immediate advice such as – do not use it, or boil before using it for drinking and cooking. We will communicate this advice either by putting a notice through your letterbox, through local media, a personal visit or by phone.

We will compensate you if your water supply is interrupted by the imposition of a drought order. Water restrictions imposed could include hosepipe or sprinkler bans or not allowing privately owned swimming pools or ornamental ponds to be filled. This is an extremely rare event and for more than 30 years we have successfully operated our water supply system without the need for restrictions. See our Wessex Water Promise leaflet for more information.

There are occasions when we have to carry out planned work which involves interrupting your water supply for more than one hour. When this happens we will let you know at least 48 hours in advance when the interruption will happen and when we expect the supply to be restored. We will restore it in the time stated.
Although we cannot notify you beforehand in the case of an unplanned interruption such as a burst, we will compensate you if we fail to restore your supply within 12 hours or, in the case of a strategic mains burst, within 48 hours. In either case if the interruption extends beyond that, we will automatically compensate you for every additional 24 hours that the interruption continues.

If we fail to meet any of the above guarantees for either planned or unplanned interruptions, you will automatically receive £35 compensation and a further £35 for each additional 24 hours that you remain without water. Payments will be made within 20 working days. If we fail to make a payment within this time, we will automatically pay you an additional penalty payment of £20.

Where we are not able to identify customers affected by supply interruptions, customers can claim compensation themselves. Claims must be made within 3 months.

In addition, we will also take all reasonable steps as soon as possible to inform you:
• where an alternative supply may be obtained
• the time we propose to restore the supply
• a telephone number where you can obtain more information.

For more information about compensation payments for supply interruptions request a copy of the Wessex Water Promise on 0845 600 3 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).

It is important we hear from you if you use dialysis equipment or have a special medical need for water. This is so we can register your details so we can get in contact in the event of an unplanned loss of supply. Please call 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).

**Water pressure**

We regularly monitor water pressure throughout our region and aim to provide a minimum of 10 metres head at the boundary of your property.

This is sufficient to fill a 4.5 litre container in 30 seconds or reach the top storey of every building. Very occasionally you may suffer a significant fall in your water pressure. This could be due to:
• plumbing inside your property or the condition of your pipework
• the condition of the pipe supplying your property
• demand on the water supply network
• the shared use of a service pipe with a nearby property
• maintenance work or a burst water main.

Each year we invest in new schemes and look to use innovative ways to ensure customers are provided with water pressure that meets expectation.

If you feel that your water pressure is too low we will look into it for you and if it is our responsibility we will take measures to remedy it. For customers on a shared water supply seeking to increase water pressure we may be able to provide a new connection free of charge from our water main to the boundary of your property. It would be your responsibility to lay new pipework from your property boundary to your home.

If you would like more information about a new connection for a shared supply please call 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm), write to Developer Services, Wessex Water, Claverton Down, Bath BA2 7WW or email: operational.enquiries@wessexwater.co.uk (non emergency only). Disputes for the need for a customer's property to have a separate service pipe can be referred to Ofwat (see page 18 for contact details).

If, through our fault, you experience low pressure for more than an hour on two occasions within a 28 day period, you will automatically receive compensation equivalent to 25% of your water charges or £35, whichever is the greater. Only one claim can be made in any one year. Where we are not able to identify customers affected by low pressure, customers can claim compensation themselves.

For more information about our commitment for dealing with low pressure and compensation payments request a copy of the Wessex Water Promise or download it from our website www.wessexwater.co.uk. If you are inconvenienced by abnormally high or low pressure please call 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).

**Pipework responsibility**

By law you are generally responsible for the maintenance and repair of all pipework from the boundary of your property.

Where your service pipe crosses third party land, you are responsible for the pipe from the point where it leaves our water main in the highway.

If you have a leak on your external service pipe we may be able to repair it under our free leak repair service – see water leakage section for more details.
You are also responsible for the maintenance of the plumbing inside your home, for example, all pipework, water tanks, taps and overflows. It is worth checking your household insurance policy to see if you are covered for the cost of repairs to internal pipework for which you are responsible.

The illustration on the previous page shows your responsibilities and those of Wessex Water.

Shared pipework
In some cases, two or more properties may share a service pipe, in which case all properties supplied share joint ownership of the pipe in question. For customers who have shared pipework, the responsibility for maintenance and leak repairs lies jointly with the pipe owners as mentioned above. However, we offer to repair leaks free of charge and this applies to shared supplies. For further information see water leakage section below.

Please contact us on 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm) if you are in doubt about where your responsibility begins and ends.

Water leakage

Much of the water distribution system within the Wessex Water region was built in the 19th century and the early years of the last century.

A large number of our water mains are more than 50 years old and therefore are more susceptible to leaks.

We invest millions of pounds every year to tackle leakage and by focusing on leakage reduction from our network of water mains we halved our leakage rate in 10 years.

We can help you to reduce leaks on your service pipe or shared external pipework. We will detect and repair or replace, free of charge (during normal working hours), a leaking service pipe to a domestic property – up to the outside wall of the house – providing it is accessible and does not pass under any structure.

If you have a water meter and a leak on your service pipe has caused your bill to rise, we normally offer domestic customers a full allowance. This allowance will reduce your water and sewerage charges to the level before the leak.

For a copy of our leakage code of practice see our website or call 0845 600 3 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).

Help us to tackle leakage. If you spot a leak, ring our free Leakstoppers line on 0800 692 0 692 (24 hours).

Connecting a new property

Our developer services team provides information on how to connect a new property to our water supply network.

We can advise on connection procedures and whether there is a need for new water mains to be laid.

There are five steps in applying for a new connection:
- complete an application form
- obtain water regulations approval
- have your trench and service pipe inspected
- make payment
- arrange the connection.

On receipt of your completed application form, we will arrange for a survey to be carried out and you will be sent a quote for the cost of the works. It may be necessary to obtain water regulations approval for the proposed plumbing systems and internal fittings.

More information is available in our Developer charges booklet. For details on the application process and charges contact developer services on 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Thursday, 8.30am to 4.30pm, Friday, 8.30am to 4pm) or visit www.wessexwater.co.uk/developerservices
Water conservation

By reducing leakage and encouraging water conservation, we aim to meet future demands for water without taking more water from the environment than we do now. You can help the environment by taking a few simple steps to save water.

We promote water efficient behaviour to customers through customer literature, public events and through promoting water efficient products on our website.

A free save a flush bag can be provided to water supply customers which saves one litre of water every flush.

Our top five tips for customers are:
• don’t leave the tap running when brushing your teeth
• take a short shower instead of a bath
• use your washing machine and dishwasher only when full
• fix those dripping taps
• fit a water butt and use a watering can in the garden.

For more information request a copy of our Turn on to saving water booklet or visit our website www.wessexwater.co.uk/savingwater or ring customer services on 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).

Wessex Water has a statutory obligation to promote water efficiency by customers.

Water environment

All water abstractions are carefully controlled by conditions set down in abstraction licences issued by the Environment Agency.

Where those conditions have not been sufficient to safeguard the water environment, we are working with the Environment Agency to solve these problems.

Water abstraction was causing low flows in three rivers within the Wessex Water region the River Avon, near Malmesbury, the River Piddle in Dorset and the Chitterne Brook in south Wiltshire.

Joint working between Wessex Water, the Environment Agency, Ofwat and Natural England has led to a solution to the problem of low flows in these rivers.

This has been achieved by a range of actions to reduce abstraction from these rivers, including maximising our supplies from alternative sources. Other initiatives include increasing some sources beyond their previous levels and augmenting the flow in the river with water from deep boreholes.

Water resources for the future

We aim to provide high quality, reliable and sustainable water services that while giving customers good service and value also protect and improve the environment.

Every five years we prepare a water resources management plan in consultation with our regulators and stakeholders as part of our business planning process. The plan outlines how we intend to ensure a reliable water supply to our customers over the next 25 years.

We undertake a detailed review of our demand projections to take account of population growth, housing developments, changing patterns of household water use and changing demands from our commercial customers.
At the same time we review potential changes to the yields available from our water sources, including assessing the potential impacts of climate change and river flow and reservoir modelling.

We then compare these forecasts of demand and supply to identify any periods in the future where available water resources may not meet demand. At this stage we appraise a range of options that could potentially overcome the imbalance between supply and demand, including demand management options, such as leakage reduction or water efficiency as well as new resource development or infrastructure improvements.

Our most recent water resources management plan presents a future strategy based on:

- accommodating the Environment Agency’s request to reduce abstraction licences by 23.5 million litres of water a day
- the development of a more integrated water grid that will enable us to move water from near Ringwood through Salisbury towards Bath and will ensure that customers have at least two sources of supply to improve our resilience to extreme events
- encouraging and enabling our customers to use water wisely and to avoid waste
- protecting our groundwater resources from pollution, particularly from nitrates.

Important information

Electrical earthing
Properties built before 1966 may use incoming metal water pipes as an earth for electrical appliances. If you are in any doubt about how your property is earthed you should contact a qualified electrician for advice. Please remember the safe earthing of electrical appliances in your home is your responsibility.

Records
Water companies in England and Wales hold maps that show the approximate positioning of water mains.

You have the right to see our records and can arrange to see these by calling 01225 528262. (Monday to Thursday, 8.30am to 4.30pm, Friday, 8.30am to 4pm).

Preventing contamination and powers of entry
Water companies are responsible for the enforcement of regulations that protect the quality of water supply.

These strict regulations prevent contamination, waste and misuse of water. We have statutory rights to enter premises or land to investigate compliance with the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999. We also have powers of entry for monitoring wholesomeness of water supply. This may involve taking water samples or carrying out surveys.

We will always call at a reasonable time and provide you with prior notice, with the exception of when we are dealing with emergency incidents. If we fail to provide the appropriate notice you have the right to refuse entry.

To request a free leaflet about the regulations call 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).

Protecting against bursts
During colder months you need to take extra precautions to protect your home from potential plumbing emergencies.

To help prevent water supply pipes from freezing in draughty areas such as attics, outbuildings or garages, it is worth using lagging.

You can buy lagging, a foam material made to wrap around pipes, from most hardware shops and large DIY stores.

It is also worth:
- fixing any dripping taps or overflows
- checking your internal stop tap is working
- ensuring pipes in cold and draughty areas are insulated
- keeping pipe lagging dry inside and using waterproof insulation outside
- insulating outside taps or turning them off at the stop tap
- making sure central heating is regularly serviced
- leaving your heating on low if you go away.

Knock, knock! Who’s there? Be stranger aware!
Bogus callers often prey on elderly or vulnerable people by pretending they work for a water company to con their way into homes.

All Wessex Water staff carry photographic identification and will be happy to wait outside while you confirm their identity by calling 0845 600 4 600.

As a further precaution against bogus callers, we operate a doorstep security password system enabling you to check whether a caller is genuine. For further information request our Customer Care Plus leaflet.

If you think someone is not a real Wessex Water employee do not let them into your home and contact the police immediately.
Further information

We have a range of free leaflets about our water and sewerage services and further information is available on our website www.wessexwater.co.uk

Other leaflets include:
- Taste and odour – the facts
- Hardness in water
- Lead in water
- Water quality standards explained
- Turn on... to saving water

Write to us: Operational enquiries, Wessex Water, Claverton Down, Bath BA2 7WW. Alternatively email operational.enquiries@wessexwater.co.uk or call 0845 600 4 600 (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).

We want to hear from you if you have any comments or complaints about the services we provide. See our code of practice for enquiries and complaints for more information.

If you are unhappy with the response you receive from us, you can contact:

Consumer Council for Water (CCW)
Call: 0845 707 8 268
Fax: 0117 955 7037
www.ccwater.org.uk

Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat)
Call: 0121 644 7500
Email: enquiries@ofwat.gsi.gov.uk
www.ofwat.gov.uk
For more information visit www.wessexwater.co.uk or call 0845 600 4 600
(Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm. Emergency service at other times)