



South Staffs Water



Our Code of Practice for Metering

Household Customers

August 2017

Our Code of Practice for Metering for Household Customers

Our Code of Practice for Metering gives guidance and information on all you'll need to know about water meters.

It's generally considered fairer that we pay for the amount of water we actually use, rather than by a fixed amount --- in the same way as we all pay for electricity and gas.

Water is a valuable resource and if we all use it wisely, we can help reduce the amount taken from rivers and underground sources. If you don't already have a meter, by choosing to have one you not only benefit the environment by being more aware of your own use, it may also help reduce your water bills. Using less water can also help reduce your energy bills, as you can make savings on the cost of heating up water.

The Code is part of a set of Code of Practice documents which are all available on our website www.south-staffs-water.co.uk where you'll find other useful information about metering as well as other water related topics.

Did you know if you register for My Account you'll have exclusive access to your account online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week? There you'll also be able to:

- View your bills anytime with e-billing
- Set up and manage your Direct Debit
- Update your personal details
- Tell us you're moving
- Find information and advice at the click of a button

My Account is simple, safe and secure.

Throughout this Code there are references to useful information that can be found on our website.

If you don't have access to the internet, please call us for any information you require on **0345 60 70 456** --- and we'll be happy to help.

New properties

All houses built since 1st April 1990 are fitted with a water meter. If you have a meter, your charge is based on the water that's registered through it. Sewerage charges are also based on the water that's registered through the meter. For most customers, it's assumed that water going in to the property is equal to the water going out.

Properties built prior to this haven't been fitted with a meter and are billed for water based on rateable value. More information about our charges can be found on our website.

Compulsory metering

It's compulsory to have a water meter fitted in cases where a substantial amount of water would be used that's over and above that of a normal household. These are:

- If you use a garden sprinkler
- If you leave a hosepipe running unattended
- If you have a swimming pool or garden pond with a capacity greater than 10,000 litres

Fitting a meter when there's a change of occupier at a property

When a property without a meter either changes ownership or tenanted occupancy of more than six months, we may install a meter and then charge that property based on the water used. We're able to charge a new occupier by metered charges as long as the new occupier has not been billed for unmetered charges. We cannot charge a new occupier by metered charges if one of the original occupiers still lives at the property.

If there's a water meter already installed at your property, you'll be charged on a metered basis for your water use.

Meter location and ownership

We prefer to fit the meter outside at the boundary of the property. This is normally where our existing main stop tap is, either on the footpath or just within the boundary of the property.

The box may have a metal or plastic lid and can usually be opened with household tools like a medium sized flat headed screwdriver. If you have any problems locating your external stop tap or opening the lid call us on **0800 389 10 11**.

If we can't fit a meter at the boundary, usually due to the supply being shared with neighbouring properties, we may need to fit the meter inside your property at the point where the supply enters it. We need to ensure that all water that passes through your pipes and any external taps is measured by the meter. We fit meters we can read remotely, which means that in most cases our Meter Reader won't need to enter your property to take a reading.

Some older meters may be connected to an external touch pad that enables us to take a reading remotely without the need to go into your property. In some cases, if the meter doesn't have remote read functionality, or if there are some queries around the meter readings, we may need access to your property to read our meter.

The meter is our property and under the provisions of the Water Industry Act 1991, we have the right to access to read it, check it's working and to check it's not been tampered with.



* Homeowners are usually responsible for the water supply pipe up to the property boundary.

Automatic Meter Reading (AMR)

When we install a new meter it will usually feature Automatic Meter Reading technology. In most situations this enables us to read the meter remotely without having to access your property or lift the meter box lid. The type of meters we use are different to the Energy Smart Meters now installed in many homes. Our meters are not constantly transmitting and only send a message to our reading device when we wake it up to do so. When we do this the AMR unit emits an extremely low level radio signal comparable to the signal strength required to remotely open your car door.

Our water meters are very safe when measured against international safety limits for radio wave energy. The International Commission for Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) is the independent body responsible for advising on non-ionizing radiation. ICNIRP has established scientific based safe limits on human exposure to radio frequency (RF) waves which have been recommended by the European Commission to its Member States.

RF waves are a form of electromagnetic energy and are present all around us, both from natural sources such as the sun and other stars, movement of the earth's crust and from man-made devices that utilise RF waves, such as microwave ovens, Wi-Fi Routers, cordless phones, 3G mobile phones and other wireless devices.

According to scientific research the effect from RF waves from our meters is 88,000 times lower than the ICNIRP safety limit at a distance of 15cm and 2.2 million times lower at a distance of 1m.

As shown in Figure 1.

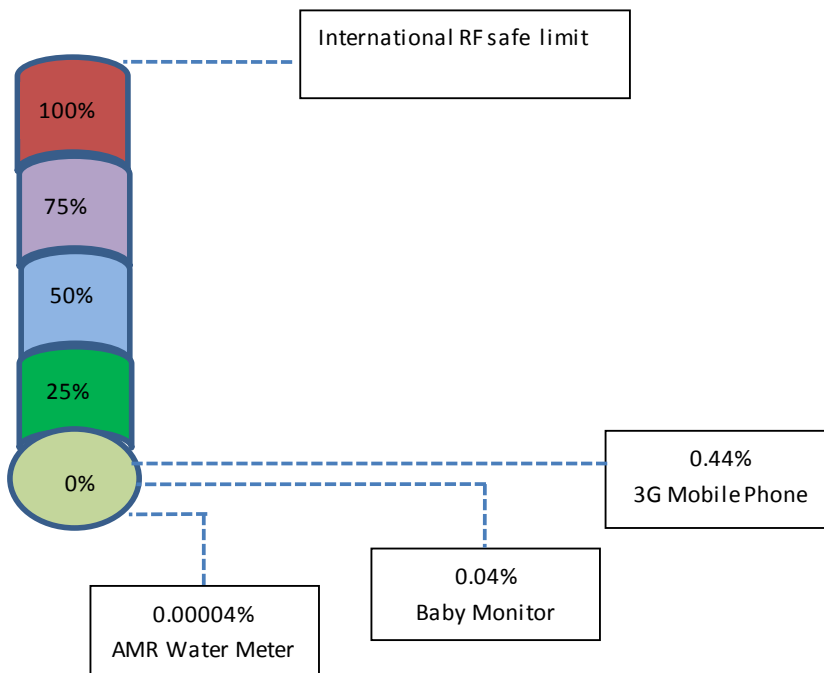


Figure 1. Illustration of how far AMR water meters and other RF devices are below the ICNIRP limits at a distance of 1m

Metered bills and charges

The charge for a metered water supply to a property comprises two elements:

- A standing charge that covers costs associated with reading, maintaining and replacing defective meters
- A charge for how much water we've supplied to your property in cubic metres. This is calculated by multiplying the volume of water supplied by the cost per cubic metre

One cubic metre is equal to 1000 litres or 220 gallons – which is around the same as twelve and a half baths each holding 80 litres. For more detailed information about charges please see our current charges scheme which is published on our website.

Multiple supplies to premises

Where customers have more than one meter that is actively supplying water to their premises, we reserve the right to charge a standing charge for each meter. If, however, the surplus meters are no longer required, the customer can request to have these meters disconnected free of charge.

Wastewater charges

As a water only company we supply drinking water but we don't deal with anything relating to wastewater. Once water has been used it becomes wastewater, and together with surface water drainage, these services are the responsibility of Severn Trent Water. So that you only receive one bill covering all water services we bill and collect wastewater charges on behalf of Severn Trent Water.

Wastewater charges are also based on the water registered through the meter. For most customers it is assumed that 'water in' equals 'water out'. The volume charge for wastewater is calculated by multiplying the number of cubic metres of clean water used at the property by Severn Trent Water's charge per cubic metre for wastewater.

Billing frequency

Customers will normally receive two bills a year. Where we don't have an actual reading, bills will be based on an estimate.

The estimated bills are calculated by using two of our readings to work out an average daily usage, this is then multiplied by the number of days in the billing period. If we don't have any readings, the usage from the previous billing period will normally be applied as the basis for the estimate. When you receive an estimated bill you can provide an actual reading by visiting our website at www.south-staffs-water.co.uk or by calling **0345 60 70 45** and we'll send an amended bill to you.

Estimates on unread meters

It's important that we read our meter at least once a year, and we'll make every effort to do that. If we're not able to confirm the amount of water that's been supplied to the property, we have to use an estimate as the basis for charging you. If we haven't been able to access your property to read our meter we may have to pursue our right of access to do so.

Reading the meter yourself

The black numbers register the cubic metres of water you've used. Red numbers record fractions of a cubic metre you've used. It's a good idea to keep an eye on your meter readings in case you spot anything unusual which may mean there's a leak somewhere. If you think you have a leak you can use the meter to check this. Visit www.south-staffs-water.co.uk/media/1882/our-code-of-practice-for-leakage to find out how.

If you've received an estimated bill, or you're moving home - you can sign up to My Account on our website, where you'll be able to enter your meter reading.

What to look for



The numbers outlined in blue record the number of cubic metres of water you've used. That's your meter reading. The numbers outlined in red record fractions of a metre that have been used. We don't need those numbers.

If you're moving home

We need you to tell us when you're moving home and to provide us with a final meter reading on the day you're moving. We'll also need:

- Your forwarding address
- The name of the new occupier – if you have this available

Stopped and inaccessible meters and replacement of older meters

If a meter stops we'll need to replace it, so please let us know about this as soon as you're aware and we'll arrange to replace it free of charge at a time to suit you. If the meter has stopped or becomes temporarily inaccessible, we may have to send an estimated bill to you whilst we're working to resolve the issue.

Although meters don't have a specific working 'life expectancy', research identifies that over time; meters tend to under register and may eventually stop working. Our priority is to replace meters that have stopped working so please let us know if this happens. If we identify that your meter needs to be replaced, we'll contact you to let you know and arrange this with you.

Meter accuracy

Water meters are approved for accuracy and are tested by the manufacturer before leaving the factory. All of our meters comply with the relevant legislation so that they're fit to be used for billing purposes. The numbers registered on the meter confirm the amount of water that we've supplied to you.

Keeping check of your water use

When a meter is fitted, as part of our service we'll check for any leaks that may be present on your supply pipe free of charge. If we find a leak, we'll let you know straight away. This may temporarily delay the process of installing a new meter on your supply, but we'll keep you informed. For more information about leaks please visit our website www.south-staffs-water.co.uk to see Our Code of Practice for Leakage.

These days many of us use a range of appliances that need water. For example washing machines, dishwashers, jet washers etc. and often we don't realise how much water these take up. If you can, we advise you to take readings on a monthly basis to get an idea of your normal water use. If you find you have an unusually high reading you may be paying for water that's being lost.

Leaks

If we notice a significant increase in consumption during our normal meter reading process, we'll let you know. This may be because of a leak or a change in circumstances, for example new appliances that use water or changes in the number of people that live in the property. If you think you might have a leak, there are some simple checks you can do. You can use the meter to check for any leaks on pipework after the meter:

- Turn off all taps and ensure no appliances etc. that need water are in use e.g. dishwashers, toilets, washing machines
- Read the meter (including the red digits)
- Don't use any water for at least an hour after taking the reading
- Read the meter again
- If the second reading is higher than the first there may be a leak. Call us on our supply line **0800 389 1011**, we'll give you some advice and if needed we'll send a technician to help further

Modern toilets

Modern toilets installed after 2001 often have an internal overflow that maybe running without you realising that there is a problem. If the water is continually running down the back of the toilet pan that indicates a leaking overflow in the toilet cistern. This is not normal and needs attention to correct the fault with the float valve. A toilet overflow discharging constantly could be the equivalent to leaving a tap running all day and night. This could be wasting a lot of water and would quickly start to show an impact on your normal water usage. The table below shows how much water could be wasted by a single toilet overflowing constantly. The volumes are shown in litres and cubic metres (m³).

Internal overflow constantly running	Volume of water being wasted		
	Flow rate 4 litres /min	How many baths would this equal?	How many 2 litre bottles of water?
1 hour	240 litres (0.24 m ³)	3	120
1 day	5,760 litres (5.76 m ³)	72	2,880
1 week	40,320 litres (40.32m ³)	504	20,160

If you think you have a problem with your toilet cistern and can't fix it yourself you should contact an approved plumber registered with Watersafe www.watersafe.org.uk who will be able to resolve the issue for you.

Save water, save money and help the environment

On average, we each use around 130 litres of water a day, which is equivalent to around a bath and a half of water. Water is a valuable resource and we all need to do our bit to minimise waste. There are many easy ways to save water in the home e.g.

- Reduce hot water wastage
- Save water in the kitchen and bathroom – we have free devices to help
- When buying new products e.g. washing machines, dishwashers – go for water efficient ones
- Prevent burst water pipes
- Keep a look out for leaks
- Take showers instead of baths
- Run the washer or dishwasher only when full
- Turn off the tap while brushing your teeth

For more details and handy tips that'll have you saving water, and money in no time --- and to claim your free water saving devices, visit us at www.south-staffs-water.co.uk.

Resolving issues

If you think there's a problem, we want to know so that we can help to sort it out as quickly as possible. Please call us in the first instance on **0345 60 70 456** and a member of our customer service team will aim to resolve your issue at the time of your call. To help speed this up, it's handy to have your customer or meter reference number, which you'll find on your bill.

Meter tests

This is usually a last resort as it involves removing our meter, replacing it with a new one and sending the original meter to be tested. We don't test the meter ourselves; it's done independently in accordance with the Measuring Equipment Regulations 1988. There is a maximum fee for this test if the meter is found to be accurate, which you're responsible for paying – for details of this charge please see our Charges Scheme on our website. If the meter fails the test, there will of course be no charge to you.

If the test shows that the meter is not accurate we'll assess the impact on your account. For the billing period (s) affected, we'll either work out your water usage based on previous readings and estimate your bill or we may need to take readings from the new meter to confirm the necessary adjustments.

Removing a meter without consent

The Water Industry Act 1991, states that it's a criminal offence to remove, willfully damage or tamper with a water meter. Anyone charged with this, can face going to court and being fined. If our meter is located on your property e.g. inside a kitchen cupboard, and you're having your kitchen refitted, please contact us straight away if the meter will be affected.

- The meter must not be removed without our permission
- It must not be made inaccessible, e.g. covered up by the units
- If the meter is removed you'll be charged for the cost of replacing it
- If a tenant or other third party removes our meter without consent, the property owner will be liable for the cost of replacement

Relocation of a meter

Water meters mustn't be relocated without our permission. If you wish to have the meter moved, you must contact us so that we can arrange a survey to see if it's possible. The survey will identify the work that's needed and we'll discuss the costs with you. If our meter is outside your property it's unlikely that we'll relocate it inside. There may be some circumstances where this can be done and we'll discuss this with you.

Choosing to have a meter

It's free to household customers to have a meter fitted. We'll do a survey first to check whether or not we can fit one. Occasionally the layout of the plumbing in some properties means we can't fit a meter, and the survey will confirm if we're unable to fit one at your property. In these situations, we'll be able to let you know if there are any alterations you can make so that a meter can be fitted.

Metered or rateable value charges?

All customers who have a water meter fitted pay charges for the amount of water used, rather than being charged a fixed amount each year based on the rateable value of their property. To help you decide if a water meter is likely to save you money and to apply for one, visit www.south-staffs-water.co.uk/household/my-water-meter/why-switch-to-a-water-meter where there's a link to The Consumer Council for Water (CCWater) calculator.

Or call our water meters option line **0345 45 67 063** to speak to us.

To help you get the best from the calculator, it's good to have the following to hand:

- Your water company details (South Staffs Water)
- Your sewerage company details (Severn Trent Water)
- Water use – e.g. number of people in the household, frequency of washing machine use
- Charges you'd like to calculate i.e. water only or water and sewerage
- Your current charges

How to get a meter fitted

We'll arrange a time with you to do a survey to see where the meter can be fitted. If substantial alterations to plumbing are needed before it can be fitted, you'll be responsible for doing this at your own cost. We advise that you find a reputable, water industry approved plumber by visiting www.wras.co.uk or www.watersafe.org.uk.

If you've applied for a meter and we've completed the survey, the meter should be fitted within 90 days of us receiving your application. We do aim to fit meters sooner than this if we can.

We aim to update your account within one month of the meter being fitted. It's important that you continue to pay your unmetered bills during this time.

Rights of tenants to have a meter

Where a tenancy applies for six months or more, a tenant has the right under section 209a of the Water Industry Act 1991 to request that we fit a water meter. While landlords may not legally prevent an application or the fitting of a meter; if you are a tenant, we recommend that you discuss it with your landlord.

Paying your bill up to the point a meter is fitted

Customers applying for a free water meter are required to pay their unmetered water charges until the meter is fitted. Once the meter is fitted any over or underpayment will be refunded or billed accordingly and we'll send a letter to you confirming this. We'll carry on requesting payment in the normal way if unmetered charges aren't paid.

Possible impact of having a meter fitted

The survey will confirm where our meter will be fitted. If we need to dig the public footpath to fit it there, we're responsible for the permanent resurfacing of the area.

If the meter is going to be fitted on your property, for example in the driveway or patio, the permanent reinstatement of any disturbed area is completed at your expense. We'll ensure the area is made safe after it is fitted. We'll speak with you in detail about what's needed when we do the survey.

Two meters at one property

Occasionally, where the property has more than one supply pipe, it may be necessary to install more than one meter. We'll fit one meter free of charge if you pay for any additional meters. We can speak with you about this if the survey finds it's needed.

If we can't fit a meter

Very rarely, we may refuse to install a meter if it would be impractical or unreasonably expensive. Such circumstances include those where the property's water services are shared, or where substantial alterations to existing plumbing are required. We can speak with you in detail if the survey finds this to be the case.

If you want to switch back

If you have chosen to have a meter you can revert back to being charged by rateable value without any cost to you, anytime within the first 24 months of the meter being fitted. Please note that the meter will remain connected at the property. If you want to switch back please contact us so we can fulfil your request and let you know what your revised charges will be. We'll need you to pay for the water registered through the meter up to the date of your request to switch back. Other metered customers do not have the option to switch back e.g. if you have moved into a property that already has a meter.

When we can't fit a meter

We're able to fit a meter at most properties, but if the survey shows that we can't meter your property we'll confirm why not and will discuss a way of charging that's an alternative to rateable value. This is known as assessed charges.

Special tariffs

Assessed charges

If the survey shows that a meter can't be fitted either outside or inside at reasonable cost, we'll offer the alternative of paying an assessed charge for your water and sewerage services. This is based on an estimated average use for the type of property you live in – for example, detached, semi-detached, flat or terrace property.

If a person is the sole occupier of a property, they may be entitled to a single person assessed charge. Proof of single occupancy, for example a council tax bill showing single person discount, will be required before we can consider eligibility for this tariff. We'll require an annual renewal notice showing single occupier status for this discount to continue.

If there is a change of occupancy at the property, this should be confirmed to us in advance. Once notified, we can revert to the original rateable value based charge until either the circumstances change or a new occupier makes a successful application for single person status. Fraudulent claims will also result in the property reverting to the original rateable value based charge.

In instances where a customer applies for a meter but can't have one fitted, the assessed charge will apply from the date of the meter survey. If your rateable value is lower than the assessed charge, then you'd continue to be charged based on the rateable value for your property.

Where a meter can be fitted at reasonable cost, or if you refuse to carry out any work needed for the meter to be installed, the assessed charge is not offered. The charges will continue to be based on the rateable value of your property.

For more detailed information about assessed charges please see our current charges published on our website.

WaterSure

WaterSure is a scheme to help household customers who have a water meter, have a low income and use higher than average amounts of water due to a large family or medical condition.

Assure

The Assure tariff can help customers on a low income or who are struggling to pay their water charges; it aims to reduce water poverty and make our bills more affordable. Customers with a household income of less than £16,105 (excluding income from Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment and Attendance Allowance), may qualify for a discount of up to 80% on their water charge.

For more information about all our special tariffs, please visit our website, www.south-staffs-water.co.uk or call us on **0345 60 70 456**.

Good to know...

Keeping appointments

Whenever we need to book an appointment with you, our aim is always to keep them, and if we can't for some reason and need to re-arrange, we'll give you 24 hours' notice. If we don't, or we're late we'll give you £20. If you're unable to keep an appointment with us, please let us know as soon as possible on our water meter option line **0345 45 67 063**.

Bogus callers

You need to feel safe in your own home and we recognise that for any number of reasons and at different times, you might feel vulnerable.

Our password scheme can help protect you against distraction burglars or 'bogus callers'. Simply let us know the password you'd like us to use if we visit you. When any employees visit ask them to give you the password before you let them in. If they fail to identify it correctly, you should not allow them access and call us free of charge on **0800 389 10 11** for assistance. For more information visit us at www.south-staffs-water.co.uk/household/extra-help/bogus-callers

Information in other formats

We can arrange to provide this booklet in a format to suit your needs --- for example large print, Braille or CD. Or if you prefer, we can translate it into another language for you.

Please call us on **0345 60 70 456** or write to us at:

South Staffs Water, Green Lane, Walsall, WS2 7PD

Complaints

We aim to provide an excellent service for you, but sometimes things can go wrong. We take complaints very seriously, so if you're not happy with our service for whatever reason, we'll do our best to put things right.

If you're unhappy about any aspect of our service we want to know so we can put it right as quickly as possible. Please call us in the first instance on **0345 60 70 456** and a member of our customer service team will aim to resolve your issue there and then. More information about our complaints procedure can be found on our website www.south-staffs-water.co.uk/contact-us/making-a-complaint