



South Staffs Water

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Our Code of Practice for  
Household Customers 2023/24

**Water pipes – responsibility for pipes**



January 2023

## Our Code of Practice for Household

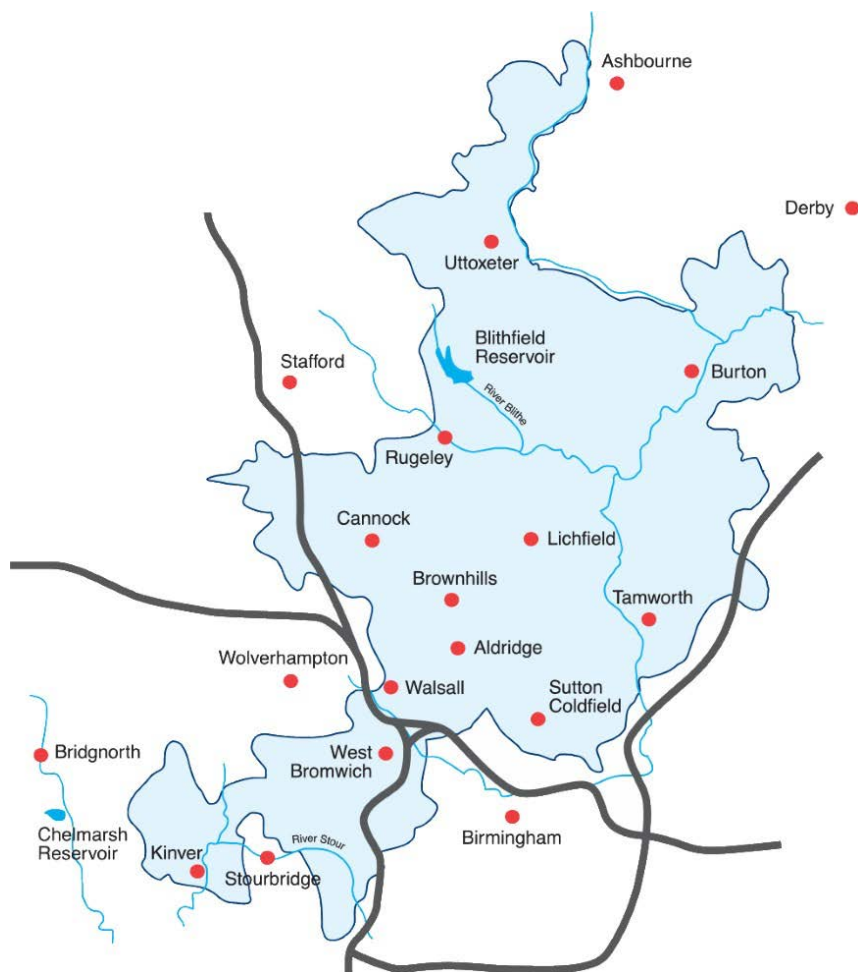
### Customers Introduction

#### The Code

This Code of Practice is for household customers and gives information on the services we provide, the terms and conditions on which they are offered and how our customers can find the help and advice they need. It does not establish a contractual relationship between South Staffs Water Plc and any of its customers.

#### South Staffs Water

South Staffs Water provides clean drinking water to a population of 1.3 million customers through a network of 6000km of water mains. Almost half of our water is sourced from boreholes in the ground and the remainder from two major treatment works one of which takes water from the River Severn. We have excellent service standards, have very efficient operations and our bills to customers are amongst the lowest in the country. Our area of supply incorporates the Black Country conurbation and stretches up to Burton and Uttoxeter. We do not supply sewerage services; our customers receive these from Severn Trent Water Ltd.



We provide an essential public service to our customers, enabling them to go about their daily lives while also protecting the environment that they rely on and enjoy.

How we perform as a business is important to our customers and other stakeholders, including our regulators and our owners. Because we want to demonstrate that we are accountable for our performance, we have developed a number of outcomes for the business. These are the promises we have made to our customers on the services they want us to deliver.

To ensure we maintain our customers' trust in us, it is vital that we deliver these promises. So we have developed 30 performance commitments, which are the areas our customers have said they want to hold us to account. We have worked with customers to set targets for each of these commitments so they can measure our performance and see how we are doing.



Further details of the measures that sit underneath these outcomes can be found on our website [www.south-staffs-water.co.uk](http://www.south-staffs-water.co.uk).

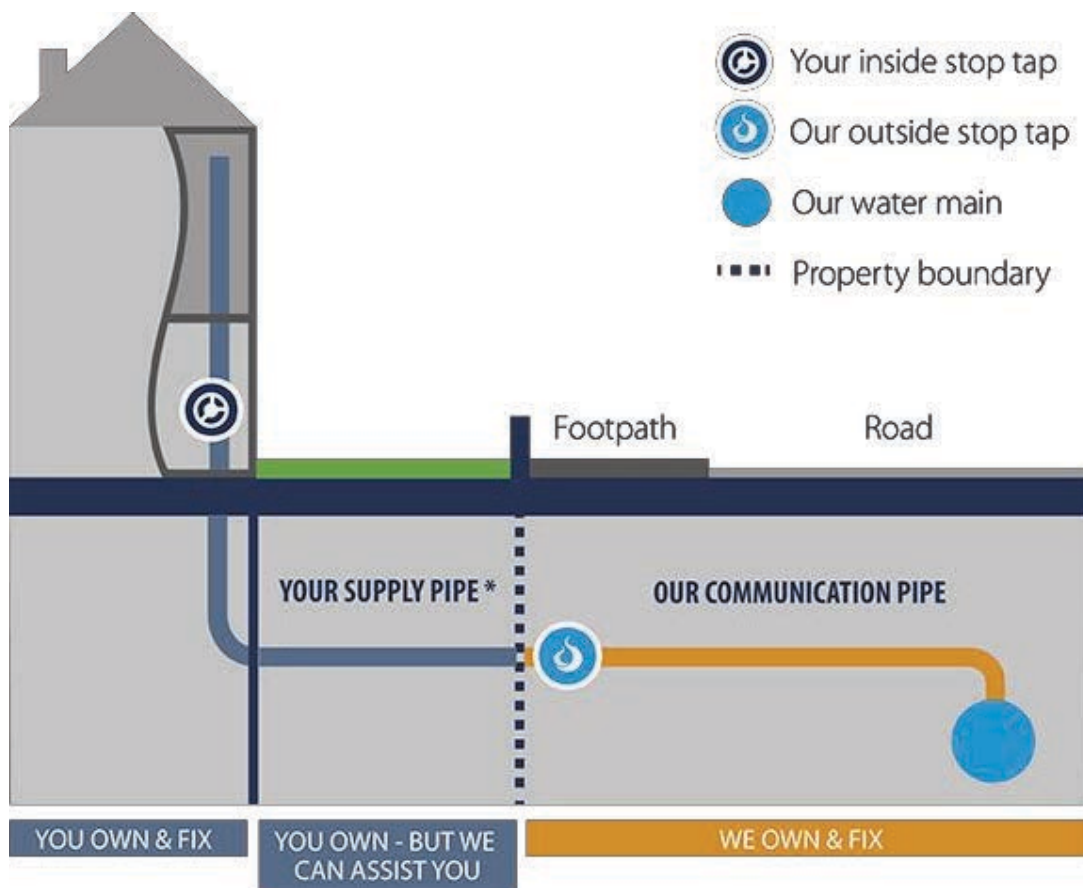
Throughout this Code there are references to useful information that can be found on our website.

**If you do not have access to the internet, please call us for any information you require and we will be happy to help.**

## Water pipes - responsibility for pipes

### Responsibility of pipes

This example diagram shows who is typically responsible for pipework. It distinguishes between customer or property owner responsibility and the pipework that we're responsible for.



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

### Service pipe

The service pipe connects our water main to the property. The service pipe has two parts – communication pipe and supply pipe.

### Communication pipe

The communication pipe runs from our water main to the boundary of your property (usually the back of the public footpath). We're responsible for repair, maintenance and replacement of this section of pipe.

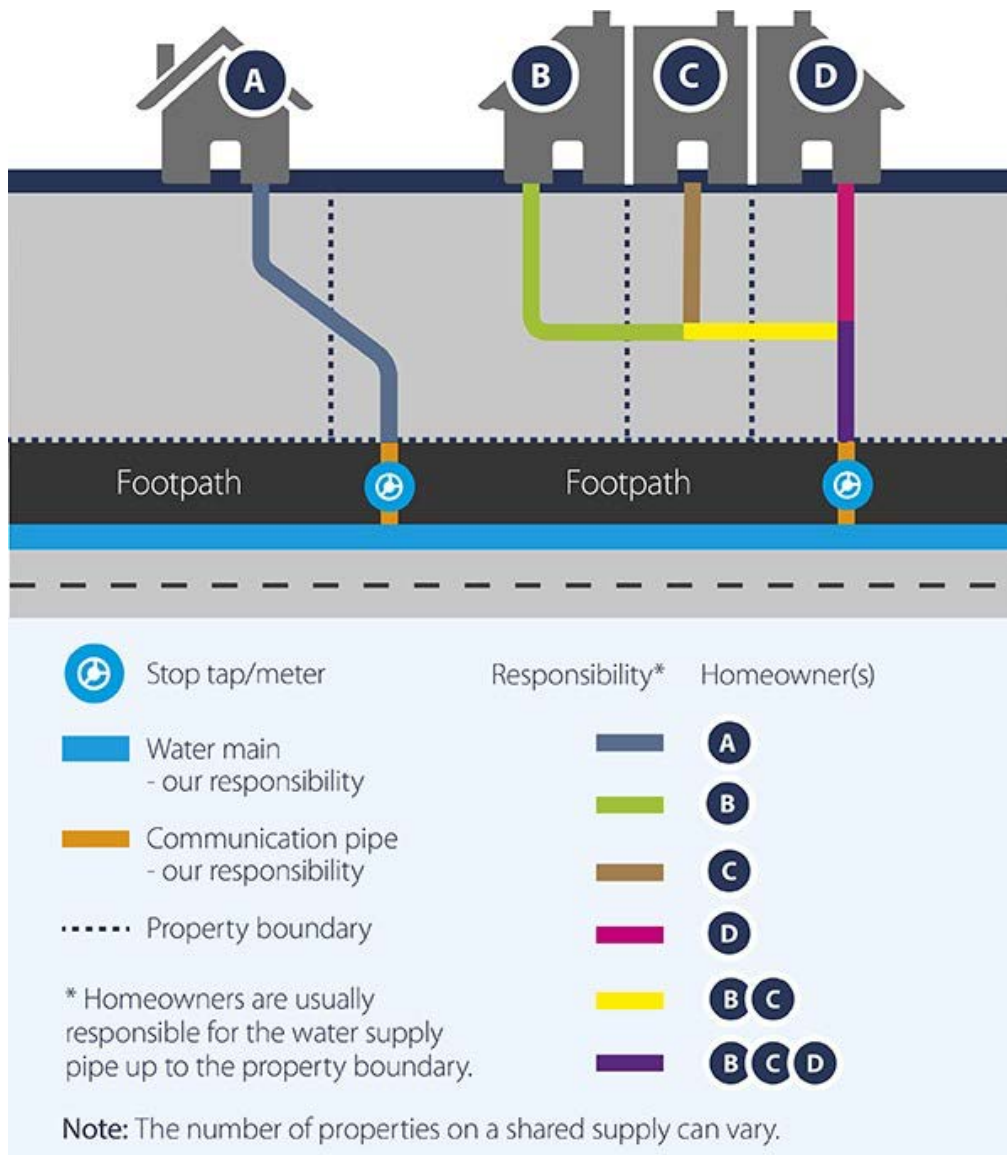
## Supply pipe

The supply pipe can be laid in the highway, on the property owner's land, or land owned by someone else. If it serves more than one property it's the responsibility of all property owners. Under most circumstances it runs from the boundary to your property. The owner of the property is responsible for its repair, maintenance and replacement.

Customers or property owners are responsible for pipework and fittings inside the property as well as the supply pipe described above. We are responsible for maintaining and repairing any pipework on the other side of the boundary.

## Shared pipework responsibility

It's often the case, particularly with older properties either semi-detached or terraced that several neighbours share a water supply pipe rather than each having their own. This diagram shows a typical shared supply pipe arrangement and explains how responsibility is split between each of the properties.





If the pipe is in poor condition, we recommend you and your neighbours replace it with separate pipes. This would improve both the flow and the pressure of water at your tap. We can require separation of a shared pipe in certain circumstances:

- (i) If the houses are converted into a number of flats or homes;
- (ii) If the shared pipe has been interfered with.

Any dispute arising about the requirement for separate service pipes may be referred to Ofwat for determination.

## Lead

Lead is a common substance. It can come from a variety of sources, including vehicle exhausts, and old paintwork, and may be present in air, food, soil or water.

### How does lead get into drinking water?

Water leaving our treatment works and travelling along our network of pipes is effectively lead-free. Where lead is found in tap water it usually comes from old lead pipework between the water main and the premises and in some cases lead solder in or near the home.

For a long time, generally up to the 1960s, lead was used for some water pipes and in solder used to join copper pipes and fittings.

Some types of water, particularly soft water, can dissolve lead from pipes. However, the water we supply is hard and as such is less prone to dissolution.

The amount of lead dissolved from pipes also depends on acidity, temperature and the standing time of the water.

### Is lead harmful?

Excessive exposure to lead can be harmful to humans. Young children, and unborn babies are particularly vulnerable and studies have shown lead may have some effect on their mental development. It may also be a factor in behavioural problems.

To ensure the water is safe to drink South Staffs Water treats its water to reduce the extent to which lead dissolves from lead pipework.

### How do I know if there are lead pipes in my home?

If your home was built:

- Before 1963 it may have lead pipes
- After 1963 it is unlikely to have lead pipes

If your home has been modernised since the early 1960s and all of its pipework replaced, there should be no lead pipework on your property.

If you are unsure, you can make a simple check:

- Look at the pipework inside your home, such as the pipes leading to the kitchen tap or the pipe which leads to your internal stop tap (usually under the kitchen sink)
- Unpainted lead pipes are dull grey and soft. If you scrape the surface gently with a knife or coin you will see the shiny, silver-coloured metal beneath

As a guide other pipe materials have the following appearances:

- Copper - bright or dull orange in colour and hard
- Iron - dark, very hard and may be rusty
- Plastic - may be grey, blue or black
- To identify whether you have lead pipes supplying your property open the stop tap chamber outside your property and examine the pipe which leads from the stop tap back to your property to see if it has the lead appearance described above.

The pipe from the boundary of your property to the internal plumbing is the owners' responsibility along with all of the internal plumbing.

If you have any lead pipework between the stop tap outside your home and your kitchen tap, the best solution is to replace it with copper or plastic pipework.

### How can I find out if there is lead in my drinking water?

If your home does have lead pipes, your drinking water may sometimes contain high levels of lead. If you are concerned about the level of lead in your supply please contact South Staffs Water. We will send a technician, free of charge, to determine the material your supply pipe is made from and take a water sample for analysis if appropriate. The results will be sent to you after the analysis.

More than 99% of the samples we test every year pass the lead compliance standard.

### What can I do to reduce lead levels?

If you believe lead pipes are causing high lead levels in your drinking water there are some simple short-term precautions you can take:

- Do not drink water that has been standing in pipes for long periods, for example, overnight, or if the supply has not been used for several hours.
- In these circumstances draw off a washing-up bowl of water from the kitchen tap to clear the water that has been standing in the pipes. This need not be wasted but can be used in the garden or for something other than drinking or cooking. You can now use water from the kitchen tap as usual.
- Ensure you only use cold water for cooking or drinking purposes, as hot water dissolves more lead than cold water.

### Can South Staffs Water help?

At South Staffs Water we are committed to continuously improving the quality of the water supplied to our customers. To help reduce lead in the water we are able to offer the following water quality initiative.

We will replace free of charge the communication pipe if:

- A sample exceeds the permitted maximum concentration of 10ug/l for lead, or
- You have replaced your part of the supply pipe up to the first draw-off tap (some conditions may apply) and request that we replace the communication pipe, regardless of the levels of lead in your drinking water.

For more information please call us on 0800 389 10 11.

Grants may be available for renovation and minor works for households with low income. For further information contact your local authority.

### Where can I get more advice?

If you would like further information about lead in the water supply, please contact us and we will be happy to help you. Your Environmental Health Officer can also give advice.

Approved plumbers registered with WaterSafe [www.watersafe.org.uk](http://www.watersafe.org.uk) can assist with pipe replacement. If you would like details of a suitable plumber, please visit our website.

The Drinking Water Inspectorate has also published an information leaflet on lead which you can access on its website [www.dwi.gov.uk](http://www.dwi.gov.uk).

### Electrical earthing

Safe earthing of electrical appliances in your house is your responsibility. It is not one of our services. Your water service pipe should not be used for earthing your household electrical installation. Many houses (particularly those built before 1966) still rely on their water pipe as an earth. If your house is one of these, please remember that the increasing use of non-metal water pipes and mains reduces the effectiveness of your water pipe as an earth. You should consult your local electricity company or a qualified electrician for advice on electrical earthing. The use of water pipes as an earth is illegal and highly dangerous.

### Leakage

We take the management of water leakage from our underground pipe network and from that of our customers' own supply pipes very seriously. Water is a precious resource and we should all use it wisely.

Our leakage targets are based upon the Sustainable Economic Level of Leakage (SELL), and we have a range to work within to allow for variability due to the weather. The loss of water through leakage costs money in terms of power and treatment costs, and finding and fixing leaks also costs money. The economic level is the lowest total cost of both of these costs, and represents the basis for our targets.

The management of leakage is one of our top objectives. This covers a number of areas, including:

- Repairing the visible leaks reported to us
- Monitoring of the pipe network to detect any increase in leakage
- Locating and repairing the hidden, sub-surface leaks which don't show at ground level
- Replacing parts of our pipe network to minimise bursts and leakage
- Installing automated equipment to control network pressures

You too can help in this process. If you see a leak in our area of supply please report it to us using the leak report form on our web-site [www.south-staffs-water.co.uk](http://www.south-staffs-water.co.uk) or by calling us free on 0800 389 10 11.



We can't eliminate leakage completely. Like most other things our underground pipe network wears out and suffers damage from the external environment. For example, from ground movement associated with freezing or very dry weather, not all of which will appear at ground level. It is our responsibility to find and repair these leaks and replace those parts of the network that are worn out. This takes time so there will always be a certain amount of leakage.

To help us achieve our objective, if you see a leak please report it. However, if the area around the leak has been sprayed with blue paint then it is likely that we have already visited this and identified the leak. If so, we will be making the necessary arrangements to have this leak repaired. Sometimes this can take longer than expected due to special working requirements, particularly from the local highway authority. However, if you have any doubt please report the leak – its better it's reported twice than missed altogether.

Where a meter is installed externally it will record any leakage from the private underground supply pipe between the meter and the property. If you have a meter, you pay for the water you use, so if water is running to waste, you will be paying for this and you may receive a large bill. We may give you an allowance to compensate for the lost water if the leak is repaired within our specified timescales.

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 this 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 (m<sup>3</sup>).

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 <sup>3</sup> )	3	120
1 day	5,760 litres (5.76 m <sup>3</sup> )	72	2,880
1 week	40,320 litres (40.32m <sup>3</sup> )	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](http://www.watersafe.org.uk) who will be able to resolve the problem for you.

Leaks that happen on the supply pipe from the boundary to your property, all stop taps located either in your garden or inside your house and all the plumbing inside the house are your responsibility to repair. To stop water running to waste we have a legal right that requires you to repair any leaks or faults on the supply pipe or defective fittings.

### Assisted leak repair service - we want to help

As previously described, legally the supply pipe is your responsibility to repair – however, we want to help out where we can. We advise you to contact us immediately when you've noticed a leak on your property and we can advise you further. You can do so by filling out a report a leak form on our website [www.south-staffs-water.co.uk](http://www.south-staffs-water.co.uk) or call us on 0800 243 352.

### Power of Entry

Powers of Entry for Breach of Regulations inspection are covered under Section 159, 162 and 170 of the Water Industry Act 1991. Except in an emergency where we have a right to enter if we:

1. Give you 24 hours' notice of an inspection to ascertain whether waste or misuse of water is or has been taking place or of a visit to take a water quality sample
2. Give you seven days' notice in all other cases.

If we have not given you this notice you have the right to refuse entry unless it is an emergency and our representative does not produce an authenticated document showing this authority.

## Key telephone numbers and addresses

### South Staffs Water

Green Lane  
Walsall WS2  
7PD

[www.south-staffs-water.co.uk](http://www.south-staffs-water.co.uk)

#### CUSTOMER ENQUIRY NUMBERS

Billing enquiries: 0345 60 70 456

Difficulty paying: 0800 09 30 610

Request a Water Meter: 0345 60 70 456

Supply problems & emergencies: 0800 389 10 11

Report a leak: 0800 389 10 11

#### SEWERAGE AND DRAINAGE SERVICES

Severn Trent Water

2 St John's Street, Coventry, CV1 2LZ

0800 783 4444

Website: [www.stwater.co.uk](http://www.stwater.co.uk)

### CCW the voice for water consumers

Customers are represented in the water industry by an independent body called the CCW.

23 Stephenson Street

Birmingham

B2 4BH

Telephone: 0300 034 2222

Email: [enquiries@ccwater.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ccwater.org.uk)

### Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat)

Centre City Tower

7 Hill Street

Birmingham

B5 4UA

Telephone: 0121 644 7500

Email: [enquiries@ofwat.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofwat.gsi.gov.uk)

Website: [www.ofwat.gov.uk](http://www.ofwat.gov.uk)