

Private sewer ownership – your guide to the changes

New Government legislation means that from 1 October 2011 Southern Water takes over responsibility for some sewer pipes that currently belong to homeowners.

This leaflet gives you all the essential information you will need to understand the changes.

Why is the transfer taking place?

Currently homeowners are responsible for the pipes that drain from their property into public sewers – this can include pipes that go beyond the property boundary – and are often unaware that they are responsible for these pipes until problems occur and they face a repair bill. The Government has decided that some specific pipes, called private sewers and lateral drains, would be better looked after if they formed part of the public sewer network which is the responsibility of sewerage companies.

Will this move benefit homeowners?

Yes. As well as causing unexpected bills for homeowners, problems with private sewers also cause disputes between neighbours over responsibility. Homeowners will have the peace of mind that future problems with these pipes will be dealt with by their sewerage company.

Do I need to do anything?

No. The transfer of ownership will take place automatically on 1 October.

Will this impact my bill?

Yes, but not yet. The additional work sewerage companies are taking on means that bills will go up in the future, but the extra cost will be spread among all customers. The Government has approved this move and estimate the cost to customers is between £3 and £14 a year. We're working with our economic regulator Ofwat to ensure that any changes are phased in as smoothly as possible.

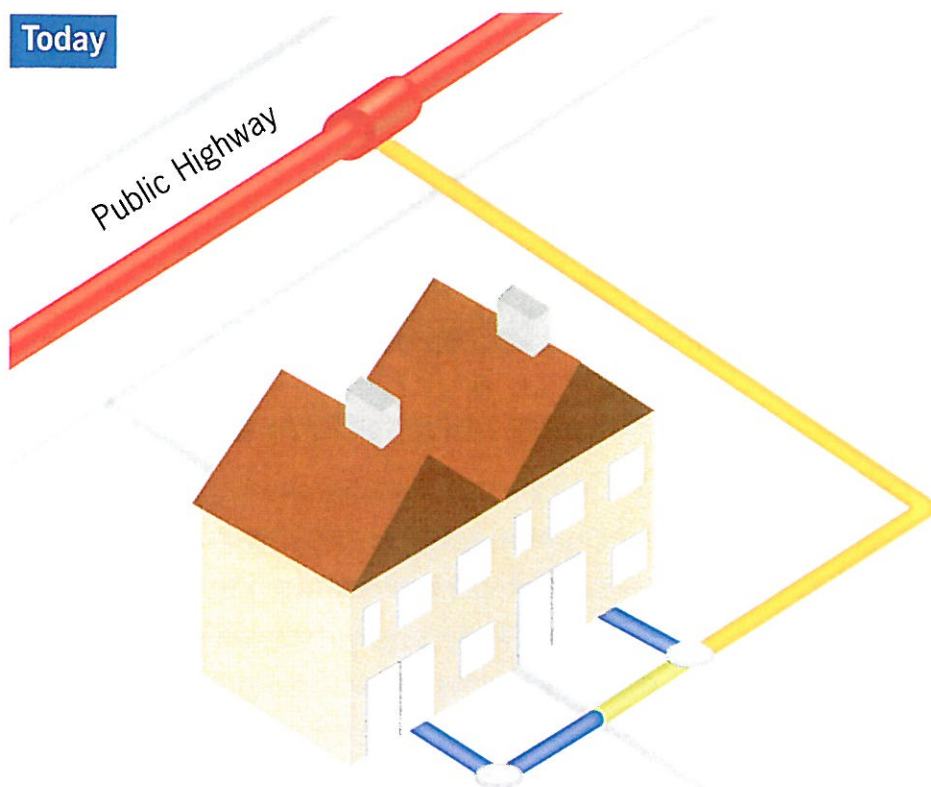
To find out more, see our film explaining the changes or send us an email, visit
www.southernwater.co.uk/privatesewers



Or you can contact us on
0845 270 0360

How will responsibilities change?

Today



After 1 October, 2011



Key

Private sewer: carries water away from more than one property to meet the public sewer.

Lateral drain: carries water from a single property, outside the boundary of that property, until it meets a shared sewer – either a private sewer or the public sewer.

Private drain: the first set of pipes taking water away from your property. These then connect to other pipes – private sewers, lateral drains or the public sewer.

Private drains remain the homeowner's responsibility.

Public sewer: takes water away for treatment through the sewer network. Owned and maintained by sewerage companies.

There are some differences in how things will change depending on the age and type of property you own, for example if you own a flat or apartment.

For detailed explanations, visit

www.southernwater.co.uk/privatesewers

Is this change happening elsewhere?

Yes. All sewerage companies in England and Wales are taking over ownership of private sewers and lateral drains on 1 October, and are informing customers about the changes at the same time. Sewerage companies have been working with the Government and industry body Water UK to ensure the changes are implemented smoothly, and on time.

Is it fair that all Southern Water customers should have to pay for this via their bills?

Currently all our customers are paying towards the upkeep of the public sewers but some also have private sewers to maintain. After 1 October the cost of sewer maintenance will be spread more fairly and customers will have the peace of mind that they will not have to pay for problems with private sewers and lateral drains.

Can I appeal against this decision?

These changes will benefit homeowners and it is not expected that they will wish to appeal, but there is a legal right to do so. Details of how to appeal are in the enclosed legal notice and on our website.

What about private pumping stations?

Private pumping stations will not be transferred immediately but will transfer by October 2016. This will give sewerage companies time to find and survey all these stations, and to work out what works are required to enable them to be adopted.

More details, including how to contact us if you are connected to a private pumping station, are available via our website www.southernwater.co.uk/privatesewers

Are there any pipes that will not be transferred?

Pipes serving one property, inside the property boundary, will remain the responsibility of the homeowner as private drains. Privately-owned septic tanks and cesspits and their connecting pipework, large multi-occupier commercial sites, and sewers that carry water directly to a watercourse will not transfer.

How will Southern Water decide which sewers get repaired after 1 October?

Southern Water will be taking over ownership of an estimated 17,500km of pipes on 1 October and carrying out maintenance will therefore be a very significant task. We will need to assess the scale of repairs required, and not every sewer can be repaired immediately. In the event that a repair is required, customers will be given clear guidance on the timescales for action and be kept informed as planning and work progresses. Priority will be given to repairs where the problem is causing flooding, or frequent blockage.

What happens if Southern Water needs to carry out work on a public sewer in my garden?

We will only carry out repairs or maintenance where it is necessary to address a current

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issue or reduce the likelihood of problems such as flooding happening in the future. Where this work is needed on a customer's property, except for emergency situations we will always inform the customer in advance and discuss how this will affect them, including reinstatement after the work.

Will I be able to build over a sewer once it is adopted by Southern Water?

Yes, but only with permission. You currently need approval to build over a sewer owned by a sewerage company, and this will be the same for private sewers that transfer. It is important to ensure that permission

is formally given so that the structure of both the building and the sewer are properly protected. Please see the website for more details.

Will this change affect my insurance policies?

If a blockage or similar problem occurs, insurers may still be involved and we do not recommend that homeowners cancel any existing insurance, especially in relation to drains within existing boundaries that remain your responsibility. Please refer directly to your insurer for guidance as to whether the cover you have is appropriate for your needs.

Fighting the fat

Please don't pour fat, oil and grease down sinks or toilets because this accounts for about two-thirds of sewer blockages.

Fat, oil and grease stick to the inside of drains and sewers. Over time, this hardens to form a concrete-like material that can block the entire pipe, causing flooding.

Please follow these simple Dos and Don'ts:

DO

- Wipe and scrape utensils and plates before washing and dispose of any waste with your household rubbish
- Pour fat, oil and grease into a container to harden and dispose of it with your household rubbish



DON'T

- Use hot water to rinse grease off pots and pans or surfaces
- Pour grease or fat down sinks or into toilets

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