

New Private Water Supply Regulations

– what do they mean for owners and consumers?

What is a private water supply and do these Regulations apply to me?

A private water supply is a supply of water which does not come from a public water supply (from a water company unless it is subsequently supplied by someone else¹). Private supplies may come from a variety of sources, including wells, springs, boreholes and streams.

Regulations on private water supplies in England and Wales were introduced in 1991 and were replaced by new Regulations introduced early in 2010. The new Regulations apply to all who own or use a private water supply. The new Regulations have been introduced to ensure that water from private supplies is wholesome, so that people who drink water or consume food or drinks made from private supplies may do so without risk to their health.

This factsheet aims to help those with a private water supply understand how the regulations affect them.

Local authorities are responsible for regulating private water supplies used for domestic purposes (such as drinking, cooking, and washing) in both domestic and commercial premises.

What does this mean for me?

Where a private water supply is used:

- for more than one house
- for commercial purposes in premises including, food businesses, Bed and Breakfast, dairy farms, holiday rentals, a workplace (where you employ other people)
- in a public building

a professional from your local authority will visit to inspect the supply and take water samples, generally from your kitchen tap. They can make a charge for this.

If the house you and your family live in is the only property supplied by a water source, and only your family drink the water, the local authority will only take a sample if you ask them to. They can charge for this service. If you are a tenant on a private water supply, you can also ask your local authority to investigate your supply if you think there could be a problem.

What sort of things can affect the water quality?

Even if water looks clear, untreated water can contain microorganisms (from animal droppings or human sewage) or chemical contamination which may not be detectable by taste or smell.

What harm could the contamination cause?

Some microorganisms, such as coliforms, just indicate that contamination may be present. Others, such as *Cryptosporidium*, *Giardia*, *Campylobacter* and *E.coli O157* can cause vomiting and diarrhoea or more severe illness in some cases.

The effects of chemicals depends on the type and amount of chemical present. One common concern relates to lead, which is dissolved from lead pipework, and can impair the childhood development. Children with higher levels of lead in their bodies tend to have difficulties with learning and behaviour. There is further advice overleaf on how to identify lead pipes and reduce this risk.

Why should we worry about our water?...Your comments

I have drunk it for years and it hasn't hurt me...

Some people are not affected as much as others. Studies show that children under 10 years old, whose homes have a private water supply, are nearly four times more likely to suffer from diarrhoea than other children.

I just heard that my water may have lead in it because I have lead pipes. I asked the doctor - she said that a small amount of lead from the pipe can get into the water and over time, this can affect the development of my baby's brain.

Some types of water, particularly soft water (from either public or private water supplies) can dissolve lead from your household pipes. It's important to minimise the exposure of babies and young children to lead and you should take action to avoid high levels of lead while you're pregnant and before your child is 6 years old. A simple way to reduce the risk is the run off any water that has been standing in pipework for a long time, for example by running the tap before drawing water to drink.

¹ See separate leaflet on Private Distribution Systems

Who could be affected?

You, your family and visitors to your home or business all have a right to expect clean, safe drinking water.

Many private water supplies meet the regulatory requirements in England and Wales. However, there are a number of groups who may be at risk from microbiological contamination in a private water supply, such as visitors and employees who normally drink mains water at home; children; elderly people and people with a weakened immune system.

If you think your water supply has made your visitors or yourself ill, please contact your local authority.

What can the local authority do to help?

Local authority staff will implement the Regulations, do the testing and give you the results. The changes in the Regulations mean that these staff also need to carry out a risk assessment of your private water supply, from the source to the tap. This risk assessment looks at the source of the supply and the surrounding area to see if contamination is possible. It also involves checks of the storage tanks, any treatment systems and the pipework. The risk assessment identifies actual and potential hazards that may affect the health of those drinking the water, so that you can take action to make sure your water supply is safe to drink. Where the water is found to be unsafe, the local authority must ensure that the supply is improved by the owners or people who control the supply.

If the house you and your family live in is the only property supplied by a water source, and only your family drink the water, the local authority will not carry out a risk assessment unless you ask them. They can charge for this service.

What sorts of improvements might be needed?

Improvements might be required at the source itself, or to the pipes or fittings inside your home, for example;

- Repairing the system to prevent dirty water, animals or their droppings entering the water e.g. by sealing the roof slabs on collection chambers, fencing around the source and digging a drainage ditch to stop surface water or water just below the surface entering the supply,
- Installing an appropriate water treatment system to ensure satisfactory microbiological quality and where required, water filters (to remove iron, nitrates, manganese etc)
- Replacing lead pipes throughout the property is the only completely effective way to reduce the lead levels in your drinking water supply. If the pipe underneath your kitchen sink is dull-grey and is easy to scratch leaving shiny marks then it is likely to be lead. Lead pipes can also be found in the pipe leading up to your house. Ensure that lead solder and fittings are not used in any plumbing work.



What can I do?

Make sure you know where your water comes from and how it reaches your tap. Knowing this can help you understand what could cause a problem.

- Clarify who is responsible for maintenance of the supply. Contact the owners of the land where the source is, and discuss your supply with them, and where the source, tank/s and pipework are.
- Clarify who is responsible for the whole supply system including water treatment equipment and that it is maintained according to manufacturer's instructions.

Where can I get help?

From your local authority and the following links to web sites www.privatewatersupplies.gov.uk and www.dwi.gov.uk.

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Local Authority details: