



Your New Water Meter

Water resources in the South East of England are under pressure and the region has been officially classified as one of serious water stress by the Government.

Southern Water is installing water meters for the majority of its customers to make sure it can continue to supply quality drinking water for future generations and protect the environment.

People on a water meter tend to use about 10 per cent less water and most people believe it is fairer for bills to be based on the amount of water people use.

Water metering can help everyone save water, save money and save energy.

What is Southern Water's metering programme?

Southern Water is installing 500,000 water meters for its customers in Sussex, Kent and Hampshire by 2015. At the start of the metering programme in late 2010, about 40 per cent of households were on a water meter, with all new homes since 1990 having one fitted as a matter of course. By 2015, up to 92 per cent of homes will have a meter, in line with the rest of Europe.

What is a water meter?

A water meter is a device fitted to the water pipes serving your home which measures how much water is passing through the pipe. Just like gas and electricity, water meters allow water companies to measure how much water you use and charge on this basis.

Why is Southern Water installing water meters?

Southern Water believes that paying for the water people use is the fairest way to charge and puts people in control of their bills. In a survey carried out by the company, 85 per cent of customers agreed. Water resources in the South East of England are under pressure due to the increase in population and the impact of climate change, with warmer and drier years. The South of England is one of the driest areas in the UK and has been classed as an 'Area of Serious Water Stress' by Defra, the Government Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Because of this, Southern Water has to make long-term plans to secure water supplies for the future and to meet high demands in the hot, summer months.

The key reasons for installing meters in everyone's homes are to:

- Give everyone control over their bills so they are based on water use
- Reduce water use – meters are shown to reduce consumption by 10 per cent
- Reduce the amount of water taken out of the environment and reduce the likelihood of water restrictions in long dry periods
- Help Southern Water detect and fix more water leaks

- Help everyone to save water, save energy and save money
- Reduce the company's and customers' carbon footprint

How is metering good for the environment?

The WWF (formerly known as World Wildlife Fund) is calling on all UK water companies to take action now to ensure metering is in place by 2020 to help protect the environment. If people don't use as much water, then water companies won't need to take as much from rivers and underground sources.

When will you be fitting my meter?

The meter programme started in 2010 in the most water stressed areas in the South East, in Horsham, in Sussex, in Medway, in Kent, and in Southampton, in Hampshire. To find out which year your water meter is coming log on to the dedicated metering website at www.southernwater.co.uk/metering and type in your postcode in the postcode checker.

Why doesn't Southern Water build a new reservoir or use seawater instead?

Southern Water has looked at all the options for managing water resources in the South East as part of its long-term 25-year Water Resources Management Plan. All the options are considered on how much water they would provide, how much it would cost customers, the impact on the environment and how sustainable they would be in the long-term.

Using a desalination plant to treat seawater for drinking water uses a lot of energy, is expensive and creates more carbon emissions. Building new reservoirs is also an expensive option which would increase customer bills, as well as have a significant impact on the environment.

How much water will metering save?

Metering in the South East is expected to reduce the demand for water to the extent that it would take until 2035 for it to return to today's levels, even taking into account population growth and climate change. The programme will save 17.6 million litres of water each day – that's enough to supply the population of Worthing, in West Sussex, or Chatham, in Kent, or Winchester in Hampshire every day.

How do you know metering will work?

In 1989, Southern Water fitted water meters to 93 per cent of properties on the Isle of Wight. Residents on the Island now use on average 122 litres of water per person per day, compared to 140 to 145 litres of water per person per day on the mainland. Forty per cent of households already have a water meter and on average they use between 10 and 15 per cent less water than people not on a water meter.

What about all the water lost through leaks?

We realise that we have to lead by example and we are working hard to find and repair leaks on our 13,600 kilometres of water mains.

In 2011/12 we cut the level of leakage on our network to an all time low, repairing more than 27,000 leaks during the year, and our team of 250 leakbusters continue to work round the clock to find and repair leaks.

Our leakage work is seeing £55.5 million spent over three years.

In addition, customers can help by calling a freephone Leakline 0800 820999 to report leaks.

In 2011/12, around 25,000 customers called the number, helping to save millions of litres of water.

Our priority is to ensure we tackle any leakage as quickly as we can.

How will installing meters help reduce leakage?

The new meters being installed are the most advanced in the water industry and include a 'leak alarm' to help find leaks more easily on household supply pipes. These leaks are the responsibility of the householder but to help everyone save water, Southern Water will fix up to three external leaks free of charge. We estimate that the leak alarms on the new meters will help save up to 5 million litres of water a day.

How will the metering programme work?

There is no need to apply, Southern Water will contact you before your meter is fitted. Installation is free and in most cases the meter will be fitted in the public footpath outside your property so there is no need to come into your home.

You will be provided with lots of written information about your meter and your metered bill. The teams will work on a street-by-street basis and when they are in your area, an exhibition unit will be parked in the street so you can talk to Southern Water's advisors directly.

Do I have to read the meter?

Southern Water will read your meter twice a year to calculate your bills.

The new meters are Automated Meter Reading (AMR) meters, which means they can be read by a meter reader driving by with a computer. This means Southern Water can take up to 20,000 readings each day, rather than 200 each day when each meter had to be visually read.

When your meter is installed, Southern Water's teams can show you how to read your own meter if you wish to do so.

What about bogus callers?

The safety of customers is very important so Southern Water is working closely with Sussex, Kent and Hampshire Police and Crimestoppers so they are aware of where and when the metering teams are working.

Everyone working on Southern Water's metering programme will wear a uniform with the Southern Water logo and branding. Vans will also carry the Southern Water name and logo. Always ask for identification when someone calls at your house saying they are from a water company. Southern Water's employees are always happy to wait while customers check their identification.

How will my bills be calculated?

Like gas and electricity, people will be charged for the amount of water that they use.

This is measured in cubic metres (one cubic metre = 1,000 litres).

As well as paying for the amount of water supplied to them, customers will be charged for each cubic metre of wastewater which goes into the sewerage system and is then treated and returned to local rivers, reservoirs or the sea.

Wastewater bills are calculated on the basis that only 92.5 per cent of the water people use is returned to the sewers, the rest is consumed in the home, used on gardens or evaporates.

So if you use 100 cubic metres of water, you will also be charged for 92.5 cubic metres of wastewater.

There is also a fixed standing charge to cover the cost of reading meters, processing bills and payments and answering enquiries. The bills also include a charge for Highway drainage and surface water drainage.

What will the new prices be?

Between April 2012 and March 2013, metered customers pay £1.134 per 1,000 litres of water and £2.08 per 1,000 litres of wastewater.

Our average metered water and sewerage bill is £391 for 2012/2013, £57 lower than the average unmetered bill.

What can you do with 1,000 litres?

Currently 1,000 litres of water costs just over £1, not including the wastewater charge. This is enough water to:

- Have a five minute shower every day for a month
- Use 125 bowls of water for washing up
- Have 13 full baths
- Wash 20 full loads in the washing machine
- Run a garden sprinkler for one hour

Will bills go up?

As households move to metered charges, about half will see their bills go down and half will see an increase in their water bills. This is because at the moment, water bills are based on the rateable value of the house, whereas on a meter they are based on the amount of water people use.

What support is available if my bill goes up?

Southern Water has developed a Changeover Tariff to help people who see an increase in their bills. On the Changeover Tariff, the increase will be phased in gradually over three years to give people time to adjust to their metered charges and understand how to manage their water use and bills.

Customers can carry out a free, online Home Saver Check to find advice and practical information on water saving at Southern Water's metering website at: www.southernwater.co.uk/metering

What if I can't pay a higher bill?

Southern Water has also introduced a Support Tariff to help customers whose bills go up on a water meter and who have genuine difficulty in paying. To move on to the Support tariff, customers must agree to a free Home Saver Check to help reduce their water and energy use in the home. This includes the installation of free water saving devices. Customers are then offered a free financial review by an independent company, which will help them claim any benefits to which they are entitled. If recommended for the Support tariff, the customer's bill will be capped at the equivalent rate of their rateable value bill.

What If I have special circumstances?

There are several options to help customers who cannot afford to pay their bills, or have to use a lot of water for medical reasons or have a large family and are on benefits. Customers should contact Southern Water to discuss their personal circumstances.

How can people find out about support for their bills?

Southern Water will contact customers directly when their water meters are installed to explain their bills and the support which is available. On the day water meters are installed, an exhibition trailer will be parked in the road where people can speak to an advisor face to face.

Why are you not installing water meters for 100 per cent of households?

Some properties have complex plumbing systems and more than one flat or house has the same supply pipe so it is difficult to measure how much water is used. These make up about eight per cent of households and these properties will not get a water meter in this programme. Southern Water hopes to fit meters in these households after 2015.

How will people who can't have a water meter be charged?

Customers not already on a water meter will continue to pay their bills based on the rateable value of their property, until the metering programme reaches their area. Then households where Southern Water is unable to fit a meter will be moved on to an assessed charge.

These are a range of fixed annual charges which are based on the number of bedrooms in the house (ranging from a studio or one bedroom property to five or more bedrooms).

What if I have already got a water meter?

When the metering programme reaches your area, Southern Water will replace old water meters which are nearing the end of their lifespan with the new advanced meters.

How can I save water?

There are lots of simple ways to save water in the home and garden, which can also lead to saving energy and saving money on bills. To find out how much water you use in your home log on to www.southernwater.co.uk/metering and click on our 'Saving at home' tool to find lots of useful tips on saving. Easy water saving tips to think about include:

- Fitting a Save-a-flush bag in older toilet cisterns to save a litre with every flush
- Spend one less minute in the shower each day
- Fit a shower aerator to your showerhead to save litres of water every minute
- Put full loads in your washing machine and dishwasher before switching on
- Fitting a tap aerator in the bathroom or kitchen to reduce the flow
- Turn off the tap when brushing your teeth
- Only boiling as much water as you need when making a brew
- Installing water butts in the garden to collect rainwater for plants
- Fitting a trigger hose to your hosepipe
- Washing your car with a bucket and sponge

How does saving water save energy?

Saving water means savings can also be made on household energy bills because you will reduce the amount of hot water used in your home. Heating water for day to day tasks such as taking a shower, washing clothes and boiling the kettle makes up about 20 per cent of the average home's carbon footprint. This can add up to about £200 a year on gas and electricity bills.

How can I find out more?

To find out more about Southern Water's metering programme visit www.southernwater.co.uk/metering or call our dedicated Metering Customer Call Centre on 0333 2003 013.