

# External flooding explained



## We are very sorry that you have suffered waste water flooding.

Flooding is an issue of increasing concern to our customers. Scottish Water has a role to play in dealing with flooding, along with other public bodies. The responsibilities surrounding flooding are complex, and at present a number of agencies have responsibility for dealing with different aspects of flooding in Scotland.

### This factsheet provides you with information on:

- what causes waste water flooding
- what health risks are there
- what can you do to help reduce the likelihood of future flooding at your property
- what can Scottish Water do to help you
- how to contact us

## What causes waste water flooding?

Flooding can be caused by prolonged or heavy rainfall, typically in the form of severe localised storms that can overwhelm the drainage system. Other common factors which can lead to blockages that can cause flooding are:

- Defective pipe work – the pipe may be broken or joints displaced and these catch debris and paper.
- Roots – roots from bushes and trees are attracted to the water and work their way through the joints in the pipe. As the roots grow they catch toilet paper etc and restrict the flow through the pipe which may cause the pipe to choke and eventually cause flooding.
- Paper and cloth products – disposable nappies, rags, all wipes (even if the pack says 'flushable'), sanitary items and cotton buds can easily become stuck in drains and sewers. Over time this can form a solid mass and eventually stop the flow of water.
- Fat, oil and grease – if poured down sinks these will build up over time and harden on to the walls of pipes and drains and completely block sewers. These blockages are often hard to remove.
- Silt – silt or gravel in the pipe may be entering the system at an open point and accumulating in the pipe causing blockages.

From changing climate patterns, we are seeing a pattern of more frequent very intense, short duration storm events which put the urban drainage systems under significant pressure. This combined with increasing urbanisation (more paved areas) can result in the drainage systems in some areas being overwhelmed with the volumes of surface water and overland flow being generated in very short timescales, contributing to the flooding experienced. Climate trends predict that occurrences of extreme rainfall are expected to increase, both in frequency and intensity. Climate change impacts, combined with population growth and urban creep will place an even greater pressure on this infrastructure in the future, with increased risk of surface water flooding.





## What health risks are there?

The following advice is based on guidelines provided by the Water Research Centre (WRc.)

Most bacteria from waste water on gardens, lawns, tarmac and other paved areas will be harmless within days – through the action of the sunlight. For example, in WRc research on turf and clay, amounts fell to normal background levels within 6 days during the summer, rising to 18 days in the winter.

A disinfectant can be used on tarmac and paved areas to speed up the process but waste water on soil or grassed areas is best left to decay naturally. On outdoor areas any excess water should be removed and the area should not be used for recreational purposes within the number of days shown on the table below. It is not advisable to 'dig in' any waste debris as this will slow down the action of the sunlight.

Minimum number of days to keep off flooded outdoor areas.

Season	Turf/Clay	Soil/Sand
Spring	13	20
Summer	6	9
Autumn	13	20
Winter	18	11

## What can you do to help reduce the likelihood of future flooding at your property

- Do not dispose of fat, oil or grease down your sink or drains as this could build up over time and cause blockages. We encourage you to leave any used fat, oil and grease to cool and scrape into a sealable container and put it in the bin.\*

- It's easy really. Just remember the 3Ps rule. Only flush (toilet) paper, pee and poo. Nothing else should go down the toilet. Make sure all other items, including wipes go in the bin!

It is always important that we are notified of each time that you are aware of external flooding to ensure that our information is both accurate and up to date when we are planning a solution to the problem.

For helpful tips on how to dispose of cooking fats safely and for information on what not to flush down the toilet visit our website:

<https://www.scottishwater.co.uk/NatureCalls>

## What can Scottish Water do to help you

In the event of flooding from our sewers, we will do all we can to reduce the impact on any customer affected and will work hand in hand with the local Council, emergency services, the Scottish Government and SEPA. Our Code of Practice provides further information about this support and our guaranteed service standards for any customers affected.

When external flooding occurs we will:

- Attend the flooding and clear any blockages (if it is found to be our responsibility).
- Assist with any clean up required and where appropriate, disinfect the affected area (this may be completed by our contractor partners or representatives).
- Carry out onsite investigations to identify likely causes or need for further investigations.
- Keep you updated on findings during these onsite investigations.

\* Please check with your local Council/waste contractor for information on how to dispose of/recycle used fat, oil and grease.

## We want to make it easy to contact us – here's how:

We always have someone here to take your call, you can write to us or alternatively you can contact us through our website.

Alternative formats of this leaflet can be made available free of charge. For information on Braille, large print, audio and a variety of languages, please contact us.

If you have a disability, medical condition or other reason where you will need additional assistance from Scottish Water then please contact us and we can add your name, address and requirements to our confidential Priority Services Register.

We record all calls for quality and training purposes.



[www.scottishwater.co.uk](http://www.scottishwater.co.uk)



[help@scottishwater.co.uk](mailto:help@scottishwater.co.uk)



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Customer Helpline **0800 0778778**

Please quote this reference code when contacting us: **SWFact 10 03/22**