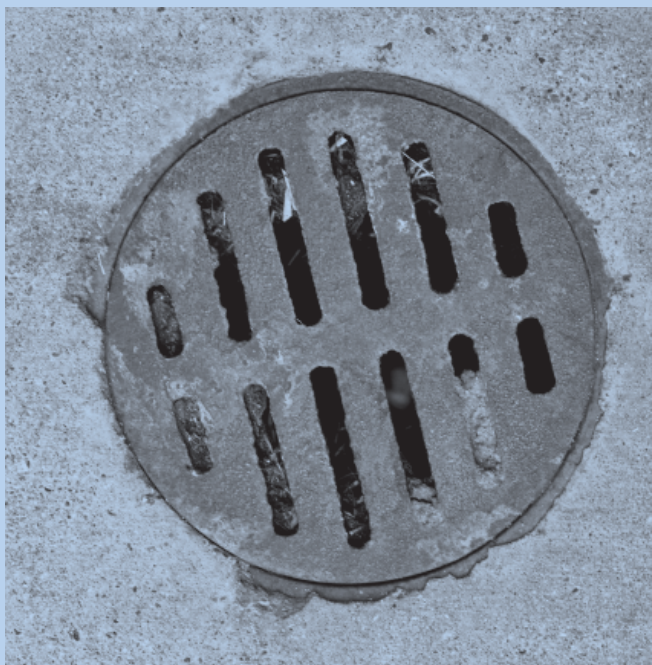


# Blocked Drains



'Your rights and  
responsibilities'

## Blocked Drains - Your rights and responsibilities

It is an unfortunate fact of life that drainage sometimes blocks, often due to no particular person's fault. The aim of this leaflet is to tell you about foul drainage, and who is responsible for what.

If you have a problem with drainage which is blocked or even overflowing, it is important to know how to describe the affected pipework. The three main descriptions you need to understand are "drain", "private sewer" and "public sewer".

- A **drain** is a pipe taking waste water from one building only; responsibility for its maintenance, clearance and repair falls to the property owner. Sometimes an occupier eg a tenant can be held responsible for blockages rather than the owner.
- A **sewer** is a pipe taking waste water from two or more buildings, and can be classed as either a Public, or Private sewer.
- A **public** sewer is the responsibility of Southern Water Services Ltd to maintain and repair. Where a sewer and the buildings it is draining, was built before October 1937, then that sewer is classed as being public.

A public sewer may have been built more recently than 1937, but is classed as being public because it has been legally adopted by Southern Water Services Ltd. This usually applies to the larger sewers, often running underneath roads.

- A **private sewer** is a sewer which is not a public sewer! Most housing estates, particularly those built in the last 25 years, are served by private sewers which eventually run into a public sewer which may be quite a distance away. It is quite common for there to be as

### The most common myth about drainage

It is often thought that you are only responsible for the drainage which is actually on your property. This is not true. The drain or private sewer serving your property is your responsibility wherever it goes, including under footpaths and roads, until it joins the public sewer.

Some drains and sewers run through properties to which they are not connected at all. The owners of such properties are therefore not in any way responsible for that drainage.

## **So what am I responsible for?**

You are always responsible for blockages and repairs to your drain up to the point where it joins with someone else's. You share responsibility for blockages and repairs to any private sewer which your waste water goes into, up to the point where the blockage or defect occurs. To put it another way, everyone whose waste water is topped by a blockage or defect in a private sewer, shares responsibility for it.

If you accidentally damage drainage of any description, then you are of course responsible for repairing it - it is unwise to drive a fence post into the ground without checking there is nothing below first!

## **What is Southern Water responsible for?**

In 1992 Southern Water Authority took back some of our responsibilities, so that with existing drainage we only enforce the law to make sure that no public health problem arises. This means that if a drain or private sewer is left blocked or unrepaired, we have a duty to make those responsible do the work. We first serve a legal notice on those responsible do the work. We first serve a legal notice on those

responsible for the sewer, and give them time to carry out the work themselves. If they fail to do this, we normally do the work ourselves and charge each person responsible for the sewer their proportion of the cost, which will include a charge for administration.

## The drain or sewer to my property is blocked - what should I do?

First of all, try to discover whether the blockage is only in your own drain. If it is, you should contact a plumber or specialist drain clearance company - there are several to choose from in Yellow Pages.

If you are fairly sure the blockage is in the public sewer, then telephone Southern Water Services on **0845 2780845** and ask for Customer Services. Ensure that you can tell them your postcode, as they will need this to quickly check their maps. If they are satisfied that you are served by a public sewer, they will arrange for the blockage to be cleared - usually the same day that you call them.

If it is a private sewer which is blocked, you should first try to find out how many others are on the sewer up to the point of the blockage. If there are only a few, you may be able to agree between yourselves on arranging for the blockage to be cleared, and share the cost. Otherwise, you should telephone the Council's Environmental Services Department on **(01795) 417467** for assistance.

## Further Information

### Useful Addresses

**Housing Services Unit  
Swale Borough Council  
Swale House, East Street  
Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 3HT  
Telephone: 01795 417467  
Website: [www.swale.gov.uk](http://www.swale.gov.uk)**

**Customer Services Centre  
Southern Water  
Southern House  
Yeoman Road  
Worthing  
BN13 3UK  
Telephone 0845 2780845**

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