

CODE OF PRACTICE



Delivering what matters

# Sewerage Services

## for Domestic Customers



**We are committed to giving you the service you expect, all day, every day. We work hard to make sure you always receive a high-quality service and we monitor our performance very carefully.**

**We aim to:**

- provide a safe, reliable and efficient service for collecting, treating and getting rid of wastewater
- deal with any problems with the public sewerage system as soon as possible.

**All of our information leaflets and letters are available:**

- in Braille
- in large print
- on CD and audio tape.

All information leaflets can be downloaded from our website.

**For more  
information please  
phone Waterline  
03457 440088**

## Contents

## Page

The sewerage system	04
What to do if the public sewer floods	07
Treating wastewater	09
Maps of the public sewers	09
New connections to public sewers	10
What if there is no sewer to connect to?	12
Work on public sewers	14
Work on private land	14
Getting land to lay new sewers	15
Building over or near a public sewer	15
Moving an existing sewer	16
Septic tanks	16
Bogus callers	17
What to do if you are not happy with our services	18
Responding to you	19
Further information	20
Other useful contacts	21

## The sewerage system

The sewerage system is the network of pipes we use to collect and carry domestic wastewater, and commercial and industrial wastewater so we can treat it and get rid of it safely.

### The different types of public sewers

There are three types of sewers:

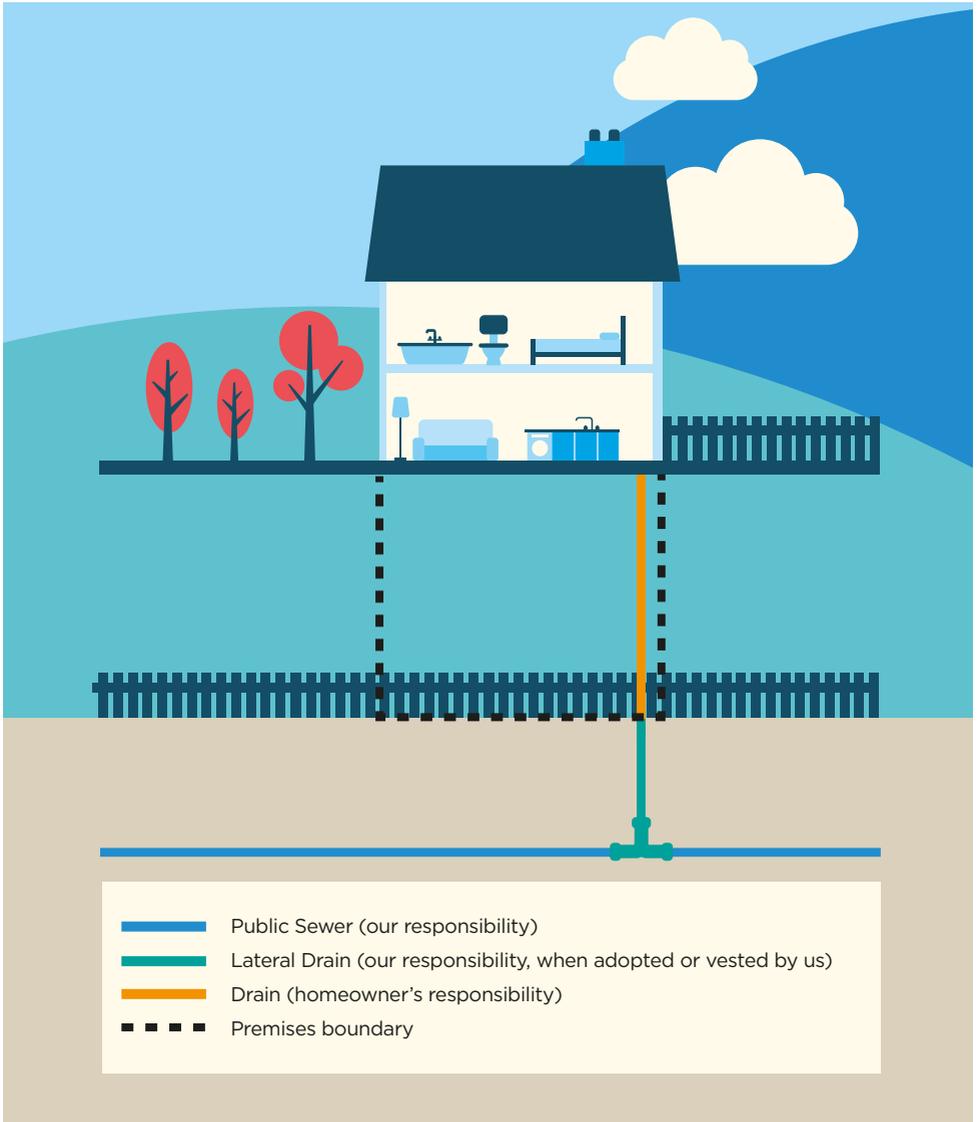
1. **Foul sewers** carry wastewater from cooking and washing, waste from toilets and waste from businesses to our wastewater treatment works.
2. **Surface-water (or storm) sewers** carry rainwater collected from roofs and paved areas.
3. **Combined sewers** carry wastewater and surface water to our wastewater treatment works. We no longer build combined sewers.

It is an offence to put wastewater into a sewer designed for surface water. You should not connect surface water to a sewer designed for wastewater without getting our permission first.

All new sewerage systems should be designed with separate systems for wastewater and surface water (which may include a sustainable drainage system).

## Responsibility for pipework

The diagram below shows which parts of the sewerage system we are responsible for and the parts you are responsible for.



### **The sewerage system is made up of the following:**

- Drains that carry sewage from individual homes to the boundary of the street. You are normally responsible for the drain.
- Lateral drains are pipes under public land which go from the boundary of the street to the existing public or private sewer.
- Public sewers are pipes which carry wastewater from more than one home. Public sewers are usually under public roads and footpaths. We are responsible for public sewers.
- Private sewers are pipes which collect and carry wastewater from several homes, usually within a private development. A private sewer may connect to a public sewer or private wastewater treatment works. We are not responsible for private sewers or private wastewater treatment works.

### **Dealing with flooding from public sewers**

Public sewers are designed to protect homes from the risk of flooding.

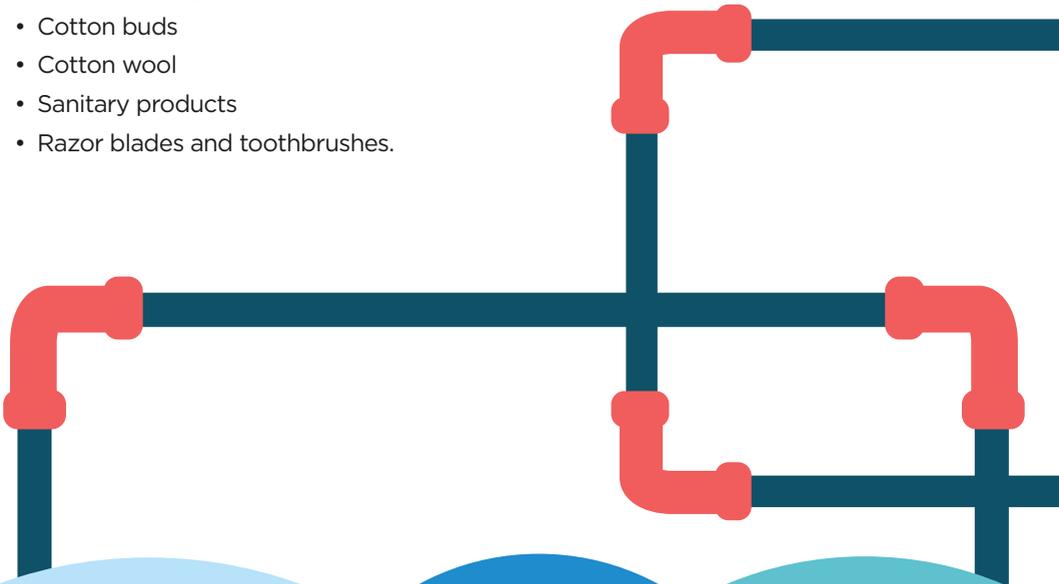
The weather will always create a risk of flooding and there may be times when very wet weather causes our sewers to flood.

Sewers can also flood for other reasons, for example if they get blocked or collapse.

We are responsible for removing blockages in public sewers, but not in private sewers or drains.

### **To prevent blockages the following items should never be flushed into the sewer:**

- Nappies and baby wipes
- Fats, oils and grease
- Cotton buds
- Cotton wool
- Sanitary products
- Razor blades and toothbrushes.



## What to do if the public sewer floods

Unfortunately, sewers do sometimes flood. We understand the upset and inconvenience this causes, particularly if sewage enters your home.

We aim to deal with flooding from sewers quickly and help as much as possible afterwards.

If a sewer floods, you should phone Waterline as quickly as possible so we can give you help and advice. Alternatively, you can report flooding through the Flooding Incident Line on 0300 200 0100 and your details will be passed to the most appropriate organisation.

If you are on our Customer Care Register and you tell us that your home is being flooded, we will be able to respond more quickly. To register for free, please phone Waterline and ask for a copy of our leaflet, 'Customer Care Register'.

### Our promises

- If your home is flooded with wastewater from one of our sewers and you let us know, we will be there within four hours of receiving your call.
- We aim to unblock public sewers as quickly as possible and if you call us before 2pm we will respond and unblock the sewer within 8 hours. If you call us after 2pm we will unblock the sewer before midday the following day.
- After a sewer floods we will assist you to clean up by performing a litter pick, wash through of hard surfaces and applying disinfectant to the area. This is the practice recommended by the Water Research Council (see our leaflet 'Advice for customers who have suffered flooding'). This clean up will normally take place during attendance to the sewer flooding but there will be occasions when this will be deferred in agreement with you.



There are times when these promises do not apply. For example, if the fault or blockage is in your private drains or sewers. They also do not apply if the flooding is caused by exceptional events, such as a river or stream overflowing or extreme rainfall.

We are not legally responsible for loss or damage caused by flooding that is beyond our control.

If you are affected by flooding you should contact your insurance company as soon as possible.

For more information on how to deal with flooding, please phone Waterline. You can also ask us for a free copy of our leaflet, 'Advice For Customers Who Have Suffered Flooding'. You can download this leaflet from our website.



## Treating wastewater

Sewers carry wastewater from homes and businesses to wastewater treatment works, where we treat and get rid of it safely. After we have treated it, the cleaned water (effluent) must meet conditions set by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) before it goes to a nearby river, lough or the sea.

The NIEA monitors and tests the effluent to make sure it meets strict standards. The NIEA records the results of these tests in a public register. You can arrange to inspect this register by contacting the NIEA. Details on page 21.

As part of the process of treating water, we produce sludge. We treat this sludge again to meet European Commission requirements.

## Maps of the public sewers

We keep maps of the public sewers. We do not have records of the private sewers within private property.

To get a copy of a map by post, please fill in an application form and send it to our Developer Services Team at:

Northern Ireland Water  
188 Larne Road  
Ballymena  
BT42 3HA



You can download an application form from our website.

There is a small charge for this service.

To discuss this application, or to make an appointment to look at our maps free of charge at a designated Northern Ireland Water office, please contact us on Waterline.

## New connections to public sewers

You can connect your drains to our sewerage system, as long as:

- this is practical
- you pay all the costs
- you obtain permission beforehand and meet the conditions of the application process; and
- you meet the requirements of the roads authority where applicable - written evidence needs to be provided.

As the approved utility for the installation of sewers in a public street, Northern Ireland Water can provide this service for you.

### How to apply

If you want us to connect you to the public sewer, you must apply to us in writing. You can get information on how to apply and an application form by phoning Waterline or on our website.

### Our promises

We will tell you our decision within 21 calendar days of the date we receive your application and all relevant details.

### If we approve your application, we will tell you:

- the charges you will have to pay
- the conditions which you will need to meet.

You must pay all charges before you start to make the connection.

### **For each new connection, you will have to pay:**

- a charge for us inspecting the work or carrying out the work ourselves; and
- a fixed contribution which we invest back into our local sewerage network (this is called an ‘infrastructure charge’).

Only our contractor or one we have approved may carry out the work.

If the connection is carried out by our contractor, a date for the work will be arranged with you after you have paid the charges. We will aim to make the connection within 21 calendar days, or by agreement for the larger diameter connections. We will be responsible for all excavation and reinstatement work in the public highway associated with the sewer connection.

If you choose to use an approved contractor, you must give us at least 7 calendar days notice of the day your contractor will be doing the work. We will then inspect the connection to make sure it meets our standards. You will be responsible for excavating the trench, exposing the sewer, making the connection, backfilling the excavation and completing reinstatement. We will charge you for inspecting the connection. This charge must be paid before you start work.

### **If we refuse your application**

If we refuse your application we will tell you why. If you do not agree with our decision, you can contact the Consumer Council. You can find their contact details on page 20 of this document.

### **What if there is no sewer to connect to?**



Sometimes an extension of the public sewer may be needed if there is no sewer close to your home. You can ask us to provide a new sewer, either on your own or with your neighbours. This is known as a 'requisitioning process'.

We will provide a new sewer if it is possible and you pay our charges. We will give an allowance towards the cost of the new sewer.

We have explained the procedures for applying for a new sewer in detail in our developer's information pack.

Please phone our Developer Services Team on Waterline to discuss what you need to do. Copies of the relevant section of the Developer's Information Guidelines can be downloaded from our website.

### **Our promises**

- We will tell you our decision within two months of the date we receive your application.
- If we agree to provide a new sewer, we must make it available for you to use within six months of the day you pay the charges or the day we agree the connection details, whichever is later. Some major schemes need longer than six months to provide, so we may extend the time limit by agreeing this with you.
- If you have paid a deposit for a public sewer extension, and we do not provide it by the agreed date, you will be entitled to interest for each three-month period the sewer is delayed. The rate of interest is set by the Utility Regulator.

## Taking responsibility for sewers and lateral drains in new developments

When a new development is built, the developer will install the sewers and drains. The developer will be responsible for the sewers. If the sewers have been built to the standard required by us, the developer can ask us to take responsibility for the sewers through a formal process.

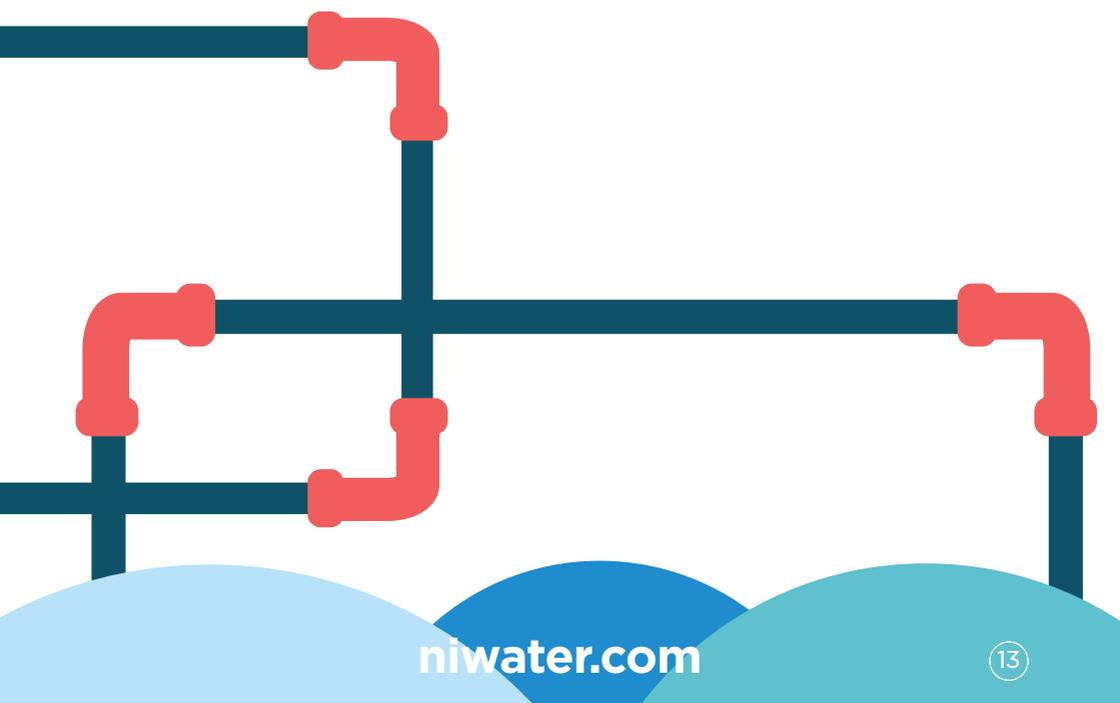
We will only take responsibility for the sewers and lateral drains once we are satisfied that they have been built in line with the conditions of the agreement. The developer must apply to us and pay administration, inspection, adoption and legal fees.

## Taking responsibility for existing private sewers and lateral drains

Sometimes we can take over responsibility from you for existing private sewers and lateral drains, as long as they are built to our standards and have been properly maintained. If you want us to do this, you will have to pay administration, inspection, adoption and legal fees and the costs of any repairs needed to bring them up to a suitable standard. Once we have taken over the sewers and lateral drains, we will maintain them.

You can find details of both these procedures in our developer's information pack. Copies of the relevant section of the Developer's Information Guidelines can be downloaded from our website.

If you want to discuss what you need to do, call our Developer Services Team on Waterline.



## Work on public sewers

Our sewers are usually under roads or in public open places.

When we carry out work on public roads, we will:

- provide advance notice to road users where necessary
- try to cause as little disruption as possible
- make sure the work is safe for the public at all times
- put the road or footpath back to the standard set out in the Street Works (Northern Ireland) Order 2007.

## Work on private land

Sometimes our sewers run through private land. We may need to come onto your land to maintain or inspect the public sewerage system. In this case, we have the right to come onto your land, as long as we give you notice.

We will contact you before we do any work and tell you in writing about what we need to do.

In an emergency we may need to come onto your land without giving you notice, but we will try to contact you beforehand.

### Our promises

- If we need to access your land to make changes to an existing sewer we will give you at least 42 days' written notice before the work starts.
- If we are going to put in a sewer, we will advise you in writing, providing 3 months' notice before we start the work.
- If we need to use our right to acquire land, someone will visit you to explain what will happen and tell you what your rights are.

These time limits do not apply for sewers or lateral drains that you or a developer requests.

When we are working on your land, we will try to cause as little disruption, inconvenience and damage as possible.

When we finish the work, we will repair any damage or pay you compensation for any loss or damage we cause or that is a result of our work.

Our Code of Practice on Work on Private Land will spell out in more detail our promises to you.

## Getting land to lay new sewers

We have the right to lay new sewers. We will try to agree this with you and we will pay you compensation.

### Our promise

If we need to use our right to acquire land, someone will visit you to explain what will happen and tell you what your rights are.

## Building over or near a public sewer

You must get our permission to build over or near the public sewer if you are within 3 metres of an existing pipe line.

If our sewers run through private land, we usually set up agreements with the person who owns the land so they know the conditions they must keep to if they want to build over, or near, our sewer.

If the building work you are planning would go over the ground the existing public sewer is under, you must contact us.

If you apply for our permission you will have to:

- pay for an inspection
- pay our technical assessment fee
- if we carry out any work, pay our costs.

To discuss your plans or ask us for a free copy of the developer's information pack, please phone our Developer Services Team on Waterline.

## Moving an existing sewer

In the past we often built sewers within private land. In some cases these sewers may prevent you from developing the land or extending your home.

You may be able to move the sewer if we agree. We may be able to move our larger sewers for you if this is practical.

You can find details of the procedures for moving existing sewers in our developer's information pack.

Copies of the relevant section of the Developer's Information Guidelines can be downloaded from our website.

If you want to discuss what you need to do call our Developer Services Team on Waterline.

## Septic tanks

Your home may not be connected to the public sewerage system and we offer a desludging service for customers whose household wastewater goes into:

- a septic tank;
- a cesspool; or
- a domestic treatment plant.

This includes removing and treating up to 4.5 cubic metres of sludge.

This service is currently free of charge once in any 12 month period. We must be able to enter your property and access your tank safely.

This service is provided on request and can be arranged through our self-service website (<https://selfservice.niwater.com>) or by phoning Waterline.

## Our promise

We aim to empty your septic tank within 12 working days of you asking.

If you need more information, please phone Waterline and ask for a free copy of our leaflet, 'Septic tank, domestic treatment plant and cesspool services.'

## Bogus callers

Some criminals visit people's homes and pretend to be working for us. We call these people 'bogus callers'.

These callers can be men or women. They may try to trick you by saying there is an urgent problem with your water.

All our staff and contractors working on our behalf carry identity cards with their photo and the NI Water logo on it.

If we are carrying out work, our staff may need to go into your property.

### **Always ask to see their Identity card.**

#### **If someone comes to your door claiming to work for us, please do the following:**

- Check that your windows and front and back doors are locked.
- Stop and think, 'Am I expecting anyone?'.
- Ask the caller to put their identity card through your letterbox, rather than opening the door.
- If you have one, attach your door chain before you open your door.

#### **If the identity card is genuine it will have the following information on it:**

- A picture of the person at your door
- A unique serial number
- The date the card was issued
- The person's name
- The person's signature
- Our logo.



You can check that the person is who they say they are by phoning Quick Check on 101. Your call will be answered by a trained police call handler who will take the details from you and will then contact Northern Ireland Water to determine whether the caller is genuine. Our staff will not mind waiting while you check their details.

### **If you are not sure, do not open your door.**

## Password scheme

If you are on our Customer Care Register, you can ask for a password to help you identify our staff. Please arrange a password with us. Our staff will always use this password when they visit you.

### **If someone claims to work for us but does not know your password, do not let them in.**

Instead, please get in touch with us and we will check to see if the caller really works for us.

To register for our Customer Care Services please call Waterline.

## What to do if you are not happy with our services

We are committed to giving you the service you expect, all day, every day.

If you are disappointed with our service, we want to hear from you. This gives us the chance to put things right for you and make improvements so that other customers may benefit.

You can contact us using the information below.



**Northern Ireland Water**

PO Box 1026  
Belfast, BT1 9DJ



**Phone Waterline: 03457 440088**



**Text Relay Service: 03457 440088**



**Fax: 028 9016 8002**



**Email: [waterline@niwater.com](mailto:waterline@niwater.com)**



**Website: [www.niwater.com](http://www.niwater.com)**

You can ask for a free copy of our complaints procedure or you can download it from our website.



## Responding to you

These are the standards you can expect from us when you contact us.

### Our promises

#### Answering your questions

- When you call we will answer the phone within 30 seconds.
- If you phone us we will try to deal with your questions straight away.
- If you write to us we will reply within 10 working days.
- If we need to investigate your complaint we will explain what we need to do and we will write to you within 10 working days.

#### Keeping appointments

- When we make an appointment with you we will tell you whether we will visit before or after 1pm.
- We will try to keep all appointments. If we need to cancel or change an appointment, we will give you at least 24 hours' notice.
- If an emergency stops us from keeping an appointment, we will try to let you know.

## Further information

This leaflet is part of a set of leaflets about our codes of practice. These leaflets give you information about us and our services.

The other leaflets in the set include the following.

- 'Water Supply Services for Domestic Customers' - This gives you information on our code of practice for water services.
- 'Dealing with leaks' - This gives you information on our code of practice on leaks and who owns pipes.
- 'Work on private land' - This gives you information on our code of practice if we need to work on private land.
- 'Billing and metering for non-domestic customers' - This gives you information on our codes of practice on billing and metering arrangements.
- 'Our complaints procedure' - This gives you information on who to contact and how we will manage your complaint.
- 'Customer Care Register' - This gives you information on a range of free services we offer customers with particular needs.

We also offer a range of other leaflets, such as 'Using Water Wisely' and 'Lead In Drinking Water'. To ask for any of the free leaflets, please phone Waterline or visit our website.

## Independent help and advice from the Consumer Council

If you remain unhappy with how we initially dealt with your complaint or would like free, independent advice, you can contact the Consumer Council. The Consumer Council has the power to act on your behalf and investigate your complaint about our services; they can provide assistance if you need help when making a complaint.

### Consumer Council



Floor 3, Seatem House  
28-32 Alfred Street, Belfast, BT2 8EN

**Phone: 0800 121 6022**



**Text Relay Service: 028 9025 1600**



**Fax: 028 9025 1663**



**Email: [contact@consumercouncil.org.uk](mailto:contact@consumercouncil.org.uk)**



**Website: [www.consumercouncil.org.uk](http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk)**



## Other useful contacts

### The Utility Regulator

The Utility Regulator is the independent non-ministerial government department responsible for regulating Northern Ireland Water.



**The Utility Regulator**

Queens House  
14 Queen Street  
Belfast, BT1 6ED



**Phone: 028 9031 1575**



**Fax: 028 9031 1740**



**Email: [info@uregni.gov.uk](mailto:info@uregni.gov.uk)**



**Website: [www.uregni.gov.uk](http://www.uregni.gov.uk)**

### Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)

NIEA offers advice on specific issues to do with preventing pollution.

NIEA also provides an emergency pollution hotline which you can phone at any time to report pollution **0800 80 70 60**



**Northern Ireland Environment Agency**

Water Management Unit  
17 Antrim Road  
Lisburn, BT28 3AL



**Phone: 028 9262 3100**



**Email: [waterinfo@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:waterinfo@daera-ni.gov.uk)**



**Website: [www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)**



**Northern Ireland Water**

PO Box 1026  
Belfast  
BT1 9DJ



**Delivering what matters**



**Leakline: 08000 282011**



**Waterline: 03457 440088**



**Text Relay Service: 03457 440088**



**Email: [waterline@niwater.com](mailto:waterline@niwater.com)**



**Website: [www.niwater.com](http://www.niwater.com)**