



# How to dispose of your waste responsibly, avoid blocked drains and the flooding of your home

Advice for domestic consumers

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## Blockages and Sewer Flooding

Thousands of homes across England and Wales suffer disruption and unpleasantness caused by blocked drains and sewer flooding each year. It can be a foul and costly experience, which is easily avoidable.

Three quarters of sewer blockages are caused by people putting items they shouldn't down toilets or drains, and half of sewer flooding incidents are caused by these blockages.

Drainage pipes are usually four inches in diameter and are only designed to carry water, human waste and toilet tissue. When other items are flushed down the toilet they can get lodged in the pipe and build up a blockage.

Blocked drains stop waste water from leaving your property. When waste water backs up it can come out of the toilet or sink, flooding your home. Consumers spend millions of pounds every year clearing blockages from household drains.

Flushing inappropriate items down the toilet and sink may also block the public sewer, disrupting your neighbours. Water companies spend around £15million a year clearing blockages from public sewers. These costs are paid for by all customers in their sewerage bills.

## Who owns which pipe?

A **DRAIN** is a pipe that carries foul water, rainwater, or both from the buildings or land on one property.

Drains belong to the owner of the property they are connected to, even if they go under someone else's land or a road. The owner is responsible for fixing their own drains.

A **SEWER** is a pipe that carries foul waste, rainwater, or both from more than one property.

Sewers often run along several properties or towards the road. Most are owned and cared for by the local sewerage company.

Private sewers are owned and need to be maintained by owners or occupiers of the properties connected to them.

Contact your sewerage company to find out if your sewers are publically or privately owned.



## What not to flush

The drains connected to your home are only designed to carry water, human waste and toilet tissue.

People sometimes put other products down the toilet or sink which can snag in the pipe and cause a blockage. Even items that appear to have the same texture as toilet paper (such as hand wipes) may not break down if flushed down the toilet.

Some items which should not be flushed include:

- ◆ Fat, oil or grease, which will harden even if put down the sink with hot water or soap.
- ◆ Waste food or garden waste
- ◆ Nappies and nappy liners
- ◆ Sanitary products
- ◆ Plastic bags and wrappers
- ◆ Needles and syringes
- ◆ Old clothing and rags
- ◆ Plaster or cement
- ◆ Condoms
- ◆ Paper handkerchiefs
- ◆ Multipurpose wipes
- ◆ Cat litter
- ◆ Cotton wool, cotton pads and cotton buds
- ◆ Paint and paint thinners

It can be very difficult and expensive to remove some of these items because a contractor may have to dig down to the pipe to extract them.



## Disposing of items responsibly

- ◆ Anything other than toilet paper should be put in the bin.
- ◆ Some companies provide free 'fat traps' to stop fats, oils and grease from getting into drains. Contact your local water and sewerage company for details.
- ◆ Some local councils provide a separate food waste bin, for the disposal of fats, oil and grease.
- ◆ Paint and paint thinners should be taken to a rubbish tip or recycling centre.

Water and sewerage companies pay to unblock public sewers and remove dangerous chemicals, but the costs are passed on in customers' bills. By disposing of waste responsibly we can all help to keep sewerage bills down.



## What to do if you have a blocked drain

### Where is the blockage?

It can be difficult to locate a blockage in a pipe. If your neighbours are also experiencing slow drains or water is backing up, the blockage could be in the public sewer. Call the sewerage company to check. If this is the case, it is their job to clear it. If the sewer is privately owned, or the blockage is in your property's drain pipe, clearing it is the homeowner's responsibility.

### If the blockage is in your drains

You will need to hire a drainage contractor to clear it. Check your insurance policies to see if you are covered for blocked drains. If you are a tenant, your landlord may be responsible for clearing a blockage in the pipe.

### Do you have shared drains?

Some properties may share drains with their neighbours, for example, in a block of flats. If one drainage pipe serves more than one property, all are jointly responsible for the pipe.

Your water and sewerage company can tell you if your property is connected to public or privately owned sewers and give further advice on what can, and can not be put in toilets, sinks or drains.

## Where can I get more advice?

The telephone directory lists contact details for local drainage contractors who can give advice and details of costs in clearing blocked drains.

Your local council can give advice on household waste collections in your area, and can clarify which items can be collected for recycling.

The water industry sponsors a website promoting responsible waste disposal: [www.bagandbin.org](http://www.bagandbin.org)

Visit [www.ccwater.org.uk](http://www.ccwater.org.uk) for more information or call the Consumer Council for Water on 0845 039 2837

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