

Questions & Answers

Temporary use ban

28 March 2012

GENERAL QUESTIONS

When did Veolia Water announce its temporary use ban?

We announced the temporary use ban on Tuesday 13 March 2012 and it will come into effect on Thursday 5 April.

How have you let your customers know?

In accordance with the Water Industry Act 1991 (Section 76B) we are obliged to advertise the temporary use ban with the date of effect in at least two newspapers circulating in our area and on our website. Statutory Notices were placed in The Sun and The Daily Mail on Thursday 15 March 2012 and again on 29 March to include feedback from representations.

A news release was sent to 23 newspapers and newspaper groups within our supply area, together with the national press on 12 March and again on 2 April.

We have carried out media interviews with local television and radio.

We have written to the MPs and Councillors representing the communities we serve.

All of our staff and contractors have been briefed to assist customers.

We have created a dedicated website www.veoliawater.co.uk/drought to host useful information for both commercial and domestic customers.

We are also involved in a joint water company website (seven water companies are placing restrictions on domestic water-use with a hosepipe), which is currently being developed and will be publicised throughout the summer. We are also working together on joint opportunities to continue to promote the water efficiency messages.

Why is a temporary use ban necessary?

The South East of England is in a drought situation following two consecutive autumn and winter periods of below average rainfall. We have taken this decision after careful consideration of our current and future water resources and the long term weather prospects but with much regret for the inconvenience it may cause for our customers. This action has the support of the Environment Agency, Water UK, CCWater and other water companies in the South East.

What does a temporary use ban mean?

A temporary use ban means you cannot use water supplied by a water company for a range of domestic, outdoor and recreational activities until further notice. This includes the following uses:

1. watering a "garden" using a hosepipe;
2. cleaning a private motor-vehicle using a hosepipe;
3. watering plants on domestic or other non-commercial premises using a hosepipe
4. cleaning a private leisure boat using a hosepipe;
5. filling or maintaining a domestic swimming or paddling pool;
6. drawing water, using a hosepipe, for domestic recreational use;
7. filling or maintaining a domestic pond using a hosepipe;
8. filling or maintaining an ornamental fountain;
9. cleaning walls, or windows, of domestic premises using a hosepipe;
10. cleaning paths or patios using a hosepipe; and
11. cleaning other artificial outdoor surfaces using a hosepipe.

A “**garden**” includes all of the following: a park; gardens open to the public; a lawn; a grass verge; an area of grass used for sport or recreation; an allotment garden as defined in Section 22 of the Allotments Act 1922; any area of an allotment used for non-commercial purposes; and any other green space. The definitions of words and phrases used in the Water Industry Act 1991 and the Water Use (Temporary Bans) Order 2010 apply to the Prohibitions and the Exceptions below.

Exceptions

The following exceptions apply to the Prohibitions:

- (a) a hosepipe may be used to water an area of grass or artificial outdoor surfaces used for sport or recreation, where this is required in connection with a national or international sporting event;
- (b) a hosepipe (connected to a metered water supply unless hand held at all times) may be used to water plants or gardens at domestic premises and allotment gardens:
 - (i) by persons holding a valid Blue Badge issued by a local authority; or
 - (ii) by persons who are frail or have a disability preventing them from using a water can and who do not meet the requirements of (i) above, if they register with the relevant Company.
- (c) until 23:59 hours on 4 July 2012:
 - (i) plants may be watered on domestic or other non-commercial premises using a fixed drip or trickle irrigation watering system, connected to a metered water supply, which is fitted with a pressure reducing valve and a timer and which places water drip by drip directly onto the soil surface or beneath the soil surface, without any surface run off or dispersion of water through the air using a jet or mist; or
 - (ii) any person whose business was in existence before 15 March 2012 and whose income is solely dependent on cleaning:
 - private motor-vehicles;
 - walls or windows at domestic premises;
 - paths or patios; or
 - other artificial outdoor surfacesmay use a hosepipe for these purposes;
- (d) the exceptions set out in the Water Use (Temporary Bans) Order 2010.

A complete list of prohibited uses and exceptions is available on the Wave/ Website

The term “hosepipe” is not itself defined but includes anything designed, adapted or used to serve the same purpose as a hosepipe. This means that garden sprinklers and irrigation systems (outside of the exception), connected to the mains water supply, are all considered to be hosepipes. We are asking our customers to be sensible about using water around the home (see examples in the garden and home sections below). A temporary use ban helps to reduce the demand for water and it also raises awareness of the drought.

Why have you changed the exceptions?

When we announced the restrictions on hosepipe use on 12 March, we went through a two week consultation period where all customers were invited to make representations on the uses we were restricting. We have listened to our customers’ feedback and have tried to strike a balance to enable us to save water and alleviate the drought situation, whilst at the same time minimise the inconvenience to customers.

Why have you put a time limit on the exception which relates to irrigation use and commercial customers whose business solely relies on certain types of water-use?

We realise the impact that these two restrictions could have on users and so during this period, we ask that customers relying on this exception consider how they might reduce their reliance on mains water by, for example, converting their cleaning system to use rainwater from a storage tank. We have decided to limit this exception to a period of three months because we know from current forecasts that we will soon need to seek permission from the Environment Agency to increase our groundwater abstractions, thereby further increasing the strain on local rivers and the water environment.

What happens if the drought situation gets worse?

If the situation deteriorates, restrictions can be extended in a further phase which restricts non-essential use through a Drought Order and this mostly affects commercial customers.

The next step, before a Drought Order application is made, is to apply for a drought permit which enables us to modify our pumping regimes to protect public water supplies. It is very likely that this will place an additional burden on the environment.

The temporary use ban and the drought permit require a whole series of actions to be taken within the company to get to the application stage.

The last step would be to apply for further drought orders to increase abstractions at locations where water is still available, even though this may cause further local environmental damage.

Can you advise on what is covered under the Health and Safety exception?

The legislation governing the new Temporary Ban includes an exemption for Health & Safety reasons which applies to watering of sports turf with a hosepipe. We are not able to advise you whether your proposed activities would be covered by this exemption. Sports Clubs should consider taking legal advice on this matter when considering their position.

Which water companies have announced a ban?

Seven companies, including Veolia Water Central, have announced a full or partial ban. The other companies are: Veolia Water Southeast, Anglian Water, Thames Water, Sutton and East Surrey Water, Southern Water, South East Water.

How do I know if I am affected?

If you are a customer with water supplied by Veolia Water Central you are affected by a ban. If you are unsure if you are a Veolia Water customer you can enter your postcode on the homepage of our website www.veoliawater.co.uk/central.

How long will the ban go on?

It is likely that it will continue until there is enough rainfall for us to be confident that we have enough water to meet the demand this summer and in 2013.

How will I know when the ban is finished?

There will be notices published in newspapers, information on the Veolia Water Central web site and it may also appear on local radio.

Doesn't Veolia Water Central plan for these dry conditions?

Like all water companies, we make plans to deal with long periods of dry weather. This spell of dry weather though is more extreme. We are experiencing the worst drought since 1976. Rainfall has been very low over the last two winters and this means that the amount of water now available is well below normal for this time of year. The cumulative rainfall is the least seen for 120 years in our area.

Temporary use bans are a normal precaution during exceptional dry weather conditions.

Aren't you always having bans?

Despite a year on year increase in customer demand for water, we have managed to avoid the need for restrictions for 5 years. Prior to this the gap was 14 years.

Are we running out of water?

We are not running out of water. However, the low rainfall over the last 2 years means that underground water sources have not been replenished fast enough to keep pace with normal demand. We have had one fifth of normal recharge this winter. The Environment Agency is warning of potentially serious consequences later this year, including widespread environmental damage and further restrictions on water usage unless action is taken now and throughout the summer to reduce demand and conserve supplies. In our region we must take action now to protect supplies for 2013.

The last time you had a ban I could still fill up a paddling pool and wash driveways. Why can't I now?

The Temporary Use Ban has replaced the previous hosepipe ban legislation, which dated back to 1945. The new legislation now has a much wider scope of restrictions that can be controlled by water companies. In all, 11 categories of use are specified within section 76(2) of the WIA 1991 (as amended by section 36 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 (FWMA 2010)).

My house is/is not metered, so does the restriction affect me?

Yes. All customers in the Veolia Water Central area have to abide by the ban.

IN THE GARDEN

Can I use a hosepipe to fill a watering can/water butt to water my garden?

It is not permitted to use a hosepipe to fill a watering can/water butt with mains water for this purpose. We would however encourage all of our customers to make use of water butts to collect rainwater, which can then be used to water the garden with a watering can or a pump and hosepipe.

What measures can I take in the garden to be water efficient?

- Cut down on the number of pots/planters you plant up this summer and go for one or two larger containers which don't dry out too quickly.
- If you're buying new pots/planters, go for the plastic ones with water reservoirs which store water underneath.
- If you put plastic pots inside your terracotta pots or line your terracotta pots with a recycled carrier bag, you'll cut down on water loss through evaporation.
- Use bio-degradable crystals in planters. They reduce the need for watering down to once or twice a week.
- Recycle plastic bottles. Put a tiny pin prick an inch from the bottom and fill with water. Then place the bottle among your plants or vegetable for slow release watering.
- Use mulches like bark chips or gravel to help retain moisture.
- Choose plants that like dry conditions – those with the full sun label in the garden centre, or check out the Royal Horticultural Society web site www.rhs.org.uk which has really good advice on drought tolerant planting.
- Don't water your lawn. Most brown lawns will come back to green again very quickly when regular patterns of rain return.
- Reset your lawn mower blades to 4cm to encourage dense bushy growth which traps early morning dew and reduces evaporation. We would recommend letting the grass clippings go on the lawn every third mow.
- Store any rainwater in a water butt and use this to top up your pond or water your garden. Reduced price water butts are available by logging on to our web site on www.veoliawater.co.uk/savewater or go along to your local garden centre or DIY store where there's a range on offer. You can also purchase submersible pumps from garden centres and DIY stores, which will enable you to pump rainwater through your existing hoses.

Does the restriction apply to rainwater that I have stored either in water butts or other containers?

No. It applies only to hosepipes and sprinklers connected to the drinking water mains supply. There are pumps on the market which enable you to pump collected rainwater through a hosepipe or irrigation system.

Does the restriction apply to irrigation systems?

Irrigation systems may be used on a conditional basis until 23:59 on 4 July 2012. This specifically relates to using a fixed drip or trickle irrigation watering system, connected to a metered water supply, which is fitted

with a pressure reducing valve and a timer and that places water drip by drip directly onto the soil surface or beneath the soil surface without any surface run off or dispersion of water through the air using a jet or mist. Outside of this, irrigation systems can not be used when connected to mains water. Irrigation systems may be used when connected to a grey water or rainwater recycling system.

Does the restriction apply to sprinklers?

Yes.

Can allotment holders water their plots using a hosepipe?

No, the ban applies to non-commercial allotments also. We would encourage allotment holders to act now to install water butts for the collection of rain water and to think about other ways that they can use mulch and biodegradable gel to retain the moisture within the soil.

Does the restriction apply to jet washes?

Yes.

I have a pond with fish in it. Will I be able to top up my pond using the hosepipe during a ban?

Yes. You should keep your pond topped up to a minimum level to safeguard the fish but please remember that tap water needs conditioning before it is used to top up a pond.

I have a water fountain in the garden, Can I continue to use it?

Most water fountains operate by recycling a small amount of water. If this is the case for yours, you may continue to operate it. If however it needs to be replenished with water from a hosepipe you can not use it while a ban is on unless it is in or near to a fish-pond and its purpose is to supply sufficient oxygen to water in the pond to keep fish healthy

Can I fill my swimming/paddling pool during a ban?

Not unless you use a hand-held container filled with water drawn directly from a tap. We would appreciate it if customers discontinued the use of paddling pools during drought conditions. It is not permissible to fill any domestic swimming pool either indoors or outdoors. If pool water is used to backwash the filters and this depletes the pool then the pool may not be refilled

Can I fill my Hot Tub during a ban?

We have checked with our regulator Defra who has confirmed that the filling of hot tubs with a hosepipe is not prohibited by the ban. Nevertheless we are asking customers who need to use a hot tub to minimise their use of water where possible.

Can I use a hosepipe from a private borehole, artificial lake, or a well?

The temporary use ban does not cover water from a private source, such as a private borehole but we would very much encourage you to use water carefully at such an important time. You may not use a hosepipe from the mains to replenish stored water supplies.

Can I water a new lawn/ grass?

Not with a hosepipe. You may still water a lawn/grass using a watering can but we would encourage you to use water sparingly at such an important time.

Can I fill the water tank in my caravan or motor home with a hosepipe?

Yes. This is not covered by the ban if the water is to be used for washing, cooking or sanitation purposes.

Am I entitled to a rebate on my bill because of the hosepipe ban?

No. Domestic customers are entitled by law to receive a supply of water for normal domestic purposes such as drinking, cooking, washing and sanitation. We have no legal obligation to supply water for the prohibited purposes and do not raise a specific charge for these uses. In normal circumstances, we are happy for domestic customers to use water for these purposes (whether or not using a hosepipe), but where we consider there is a risk of insufficient supplies being available for distribution, we are able to prohibit the use of water for these purposes.

I am disabled/ extremely frail am I affected by the ban?

Yes. However, there is an exception for Blue Badge holders and other disabled persons who register with us who wish to water plants, gardens and allotments on domestic or non-commercial premises.

Our Exceptions Policy sets out the terms and conditions and application process.

I would like advice on relatively inexpensive systems to re-use my bath/shower water to water the garden or perhaps flush the toilet, is there anything you could recommend?

We do not endorse any specific products. However, you may find useful information on the Bathroom Manufacturer's Association web site www.bathroom-association.org Any installation must comply with the Water Fittings Regulations.

Are there any exceptions for Health and Safety?

Yes, but only where the use itself is for a health or safety reason. Please visit www.veoliawater.co.uk/drought for a full listing.

THE HOUSE

What measures can I take in the house to be water efficient?

- Take a short, sharp shower instead of a bath. We'd suggest 5 minutes maximum, and remember, power showers can use more water than baths, so these should be limited if possible. (A bath uses 85 litres of water, while a quick shower uses 35).
- Avoid letting a tap run while brushing your teeth or shaving (this can save up to 14 litres of water each time you brush).
- Fix any dripping taps and leaking appliances or pipes.
- Use dishwashers and washing machines only when they are full and on the economy wash.
- Wash vegetables in a bowl rather than under a running tap.
- Don't flush the loo if you don't need to.
- If you have an old toilet cistern, put a water saving device, such as a Veolia Water hippo, which reduces the amount of water used in each flush.
- Use washing up water to rinse out cans and bottles for recycling.
- Keep a jug of ice cold water on the go in the fridge, this avoids needing to run the tap until the water gets cold each time you want a drink.

COMMERCIAL CUSTOMERS

Are commercial customers/bowling clubs/ /golf courses affected by the temporary use ban?

Yes, in some cases. The temporary use ban prohibits the watering of gardens and sports turf using a hosepipe. However we have allowed an exception for the watering of sports turf for national and international events.

We are a small business with an income that is solely dependent on water use at domestic properties – are we affected by the ban?

Until 23:59 on 4 July 2012 any person whose business was in existence before 15 March 2012 and whose income is solely dependent on cleaning: private motor-vehicles; walls or windows at domestic premises; paths or patios; or other artificial outdoor surfaces, may continue to use a hosepipe for these purposes only on a conditional basis.

We are a business using water on our premises – are we affected by a ban?

Yes, certain categories of the ban will affect commercial customers. Please consider all of the categories carefully to see if your business might be affected.

Our business uses water while working at customers' homes – are we affected by the ban?

Yes, any use of a hosepipe or sprinkler for private garden watering is banned. However, if your business income is solely dependent on this activity, we will make an exception until 23:59 on 4 July 2012. During this

time we are requesting that businesses ensure that at the end of this time period they can operate under the restrictions.

We are a car wash – are we affected?

Yes, if you use a hosepipe or similar apparatus to clean a private motor vehicle. However, if your business income is solely dependent on this activity we will make an exception until 23:59 on 4 July 2012 for businesses that were in existence before 15 March 2012. During this time we are requesting that businesses ensure that at the end of this time period they can operate under the restrictions.

Can jet washers at garages be used to clean private vehicles?

Not if they are drawing water from the mains either directly or indirectly. We would recommend that you clean your vehicle with a bucket and water.

I am a taxi/mini cab driver - am I affected?

Yes. Taxis and licensed mini cabs are covered by the ban. We'd suggest washing your vehicle with a bucket of water.

Can I wash my commercial/ liveried vehicle?

Generally the washing of liveried vehicles is not prohibited by the ban but we would encourage washing vehicles using a bucket and sponge where possible to help conserve water.

We are a bowling green/ /sports ground/golf course – are we affected?

Yes. All areas of grass used for sport or recreation are covered by the ban.

Are recreational sports grounds affected by the ban?

Yes. However an exception applies to the watering of the field of play to be used for national and international sports events.

We are a garden centre – are we affected?

Garden centres are not covered by the ban for the watering of plants but we could encourage the use of a watering can as an alternative where possible. Please note filling ornamental displays within the outlet is prohibited unless this is necessary to supply sufficient oxygen to the water in a pond to keep fish healthy.

I have a hydrant licence which I use for some of the banned activities. Will I get a refund on the licence ?

You will not be able to continue to use a hydrant to take water for the banned hosepipe use activities. We may therefore be able to refund all or part of you licence. Please contact the Hydrant Licence team on Tel: 01707 277143 or email commercial.central@veoliawater.co.uk if you have any questions. We will assess individual licence holders to determine if a refund is appropriate.

We are a swimming pool supplier are we entitled to compensation?

No. The ban prohibits the filling of all domestic swimming pools.

I run a valeting business and fill up my van with a hosepipe from my residence where I am metered, is this permitted?

Yes. However if your business was in existence before 15 March 2012 and your income is solely dependent on this activity, we will make an exception until 23:59 on 4 July 2012. During this time we are requesting that businesses ensure that at the end of the time period they can operate under the restrictions.

We are window cleaning business, are we affected?

Yes. However if your business was in existence before 15 March 2012 and your income is solely dependent on this activity, we will make an exception until 23:59 on 4 July 2012. During this time we are requesting that businesses ensure that at the end of the time period they can operate under the restrictions.

I am a window cleaning company and I fill my water tank from home for use at private properties. Am I affected by the ban?

You cannot fill up your tank with a hosepipe for use when washing windows, or use a hose system connected to the mains to wash domestic windows. However if your business was in existence before 15

March 2012 and your income is solely dependent on this activity, we will make an exception until 23:59 on 4 July 2012. During this time we are requesting that businesses ensure that at the end of this time period they can operate under the restrictions.

I am a public house landlord - can I water the garden of my public house?

We would encourage you to look at ways to collect rainwater from the roof and use gel crystals and drought tolerant plants to reduce the amount of water needed.

Can I water potted plants on my commercial property?

Yes, however we would encourage you to look at other ways of watering, such as with a watering can, to help conserve water.

Can we fill the swimming pool at our school?

Yes, this is permitted because it is not a domestic use and falls under the classification of business/commercial use.

Our school has a garden and a vegetable plot – can we still water them?

You can water your vegetable plot using a hosepipe as it is considered to be commercial but we would encourage you to look at other ways of doing so, such as using a watering can. You will not be able to water your garden with a hosepipe under the restrictions.

FARMERS AND AGRICULTURE

I am a farmer. How will I be affected by the temporary use ban?

Your agricultural activities will not be affected by the ban but you must observe all of the prohibited uses.

I am a farmer. If things do not improve will this affect me later?

If the situation does not improve we do not expect farmers to be largely affected by any restrictions placed by Veolia Water.

Can I use a hosepipe when dealing with my livestock and animals?

Yes, this is not prohibited under the ban.

ILLEGAL USE

If I see my neighbour using a hosepipe/sprinkler during the ban, what should I do?

If you become aware of persistent use of a hosepipe or sprinkler during the ban please contact us by email on: droughtreporting@veoliawater.co.uk

Will you prosecute people contravening this ban?

Contravention of the ban can attract a fine of up to £1,000, so we hope that customers will work with us to avoid the need to take enforcement action. However, if we become aware of a persistent use we will take action, including, where appropriate, prosecution.

How is the ban being enforced?

If the law is broken the ban carries a £1,000 fine. We are hoping that our customers will understand the reasons why we have introduced the ban and will support the need for it. We have teams working out in the community as part of their day-to-day job and our customers can report breaches of the ban. If customers don't cooperate then reluctantly we will have to take enforcement action, which may include prosecution.

Will the £1,000 go back into the pockets of the water company? Is this another way for you to make an income.

No. The £1,000 is a fine which is processed through the legal system. Therefore the fine will go to the Treasury.

METERING

If a customer is metered does the restriction affect them?

Yes, it does. All customers in the Veolia Water Central area must abide by the ban.

Will you be announcing compulsory metering soon as a means of reducing water use?

We are keeping this under review.

What is your current level of metering?

Nearly 44% of our customers have a water meter. Our target is to have 47% of commercial and domestic properties metered by 2015.

Since 1990 all new homes have been metered.

What is the charging scheme for a metered customer?

There is a standing charge for both water supply and sewerage and then a volume tariff for water supply and sewerage. Customers pay for the water they actually use (like other utilities) which we believe is the fairest system and is more sustainable in the longer term. The fact that customers know that they are paying by volume encourages them to think about not wasting water.

Are there any special schemes available for vulnerable customers?

We have a capped bill scheme called WaterSure to protect our vulnerable customers who have a meter - applicable if a customer is on benefits and has three or more dependent children or a diagnosed medical condition.

In terms of water consumption can you say what difference a water meter makes?

Our studies reveal that metered customers tend to use around 9% less water than unmetered customers. The effect is greater during peak periods.

Are there instances where you are unable to install a water meter when a customer has requested it?

On rare occasions when a customer has voluntarily opted to have a water meter installed, and it is not possible to fit the meter to a customer's property – for example when a few properties share a supply pipe – an assessed charges scheme may be offered to the customer.

The assessed charge is set at the same tariff as that of metered customers and is based on a fixed volume amount depending on the number of occupiers. This average cannot be varied as it is set and approved by our regulators. Customers are only offered the charge if it represents better value than their existing unmeasured bill and therefore, in the absence of a meter, the customer is currently receiving the best value water bill.

LEAKAGE

You are imposing a temporary ban, but what are you doing about your own leakage?

We are committed to reducing leakage to avoid wasting this precious resource. During 2011 we invested £30 million in finding and fixing leaks across our 14,600 km water mains network.

From April 2011 to the end of January 2012 we repaired in the region of 17,000 leaks and are on track to meet our leakage target set by Ofwat. In fact we've seen an all time low in our leakage level and have saved an extra 10% off the target.

Each year, by finding and fixing leaks, we save the equivalent of 65 million litres of water per day from running to waste – that's enough to fill 26 Olympic-sized swimming pools every day.

How many staff do you have working on fixing leaks?

Every day we have more than 140 people finding and fixing leaks, and helping us to deal with leakage as a priority issue.

How do you prioritise leaks?

Leaks are fixed on a priority basis according to a number of factors including the risk to health and safety and the amount of water running to waste, and where it's going (gushing into the road or running directly into a drain). This means there may be another leak close by that needs more urgent attention; however we endeavour to fix all leaks within 5 working days, with many being done within 48 hours.

How do you find leaks?

We would like to thank our customers who made more than 9,500 calls to the Company's 'Leakspotters Hotline' (0800 376 5325), where members of the public can phone in to report suspected leaks. They can also report leaks via our website www.veoliawater.co.uk/alerts

We constantly monitor the flow of water through our mains network and look for any unusually high or low flows that could indicate a leak. When a leak is identified, we use a combination of traditional and state of the art leak detection equipment to find its exact location and then the repair starts. The cause of most leaks can be related to the condition of the water mains. Ageing iron pipes are vulnerable to corrosive clay soils and earth movement.

INVESTMENT

What is Veolia Water doing to ensure future water resources are available?

Since 2005, Veolia Water Central has invested £165m on renewing and replacing its underground infrastructure and will continue to invest a further £95m for the remainder of this asset management period (up to 2015). By 2015 the company will have renewed 1280km of its 14,600km water mains network.

Veolia Water Central's current rate of investment, set by the regulator, means it can renew 1% of distribution mains on a yearly basis and investment is prioritised to maximise service benefits to customers.

Is the drought exceptional – or is this a taste of things to come with climate change?

The Environment Agency has stated that it has only been drier for four years in the past 101 years but the two year total is the lowest for 120 years. However, recognised weather patterns do tend to show periods of drought in the South East approximately every 10 years.

Some environmentalists consider it is too soon to tell whether the drought marks the start of climate change or is a normal weather pattern, whilst others see this as another example of extreme weather conditions brought about by climate change. For the latest information on the weather and climate change please log on to the met office website www.met-office.gov.uk.

Will we have more hosepipe bans as the population grows?

No. Hosepipe bans are part of a suite of options water companies can use to manage drought situations; mostly these are introduced after exceptionally dry weather begins to cause environmental stress. Water companies consider growth implications as part of longer term water resource plans.

How can you supply all the new homes proposed to be built in the company's area?

We prepare water resource plans to ensure that there is sufficient water to meet the demands of existing and future domestic water use covering a period of 25 years.

These plans do take into account instances of dry weather but not extreme conditions such as drought. This is why there are statutory measures in place to enable water use to be restricted during periods of extended dry weather.

We are able to keep water bills down by occasionally restricting demand, rather than build new infrastructure and increase environmental impact to satisfy demand under all possible extreme scenarios.

An important element of the proposal for the new housing is the requirement for new housing to be more efficient, so we welcome any new initiatives for energy and water-efficient homes.

Why don't you build a desalination plant?

Desalination plants are very costly to build and are costly to run. Many environmentalists are concerned about the economic and environmental drawbacks of developing this type of energy-intensive facility in the UK.

Desalination plants consume more energy than standard water treatment plants because of the extended water purification process and have become popular in countries like Egypt and Kuwait, where oil is plentiful but water is not. We don't have any plans for a desalination plant at this time but this may be considered in the future.

It's hard to believe, but in our area the average amount of water used by every person, every day averages out to 169 litres. Given that most people only drink two litres of water that means 167 litres is being used for other purposes - baths, showers, flushing the loo, washing machines, dishwashers, hosepipes, leisure pools, jet sprays etc. If each person reduced their water consumption by say 5 litres per day, this would have a huge impact on the amount of water available - and most people could do this with just a minor change in lifestyle (such as turning the tap off when cleaning teeth).

As an environmentally aware company, we acknowledge and appreciate that there is a finite amount of resources in the world and we have to find a balance that enables us to produce the precious product we supply (i.e. tap water) without increasing our use of other essential resources (i.e. gas and electricity).

What about a National Water grid – importing water from other parts of the UK?

In the long term a National Grid is something to be considered. Most water companies' networks of water mains do link up at certain points and at present, in the South East, several companies are working together to transfer water to areas that are severely affected by the drought.

However, unlike gas and electricity, one of the key issues of transporting water over greater distances is the weight. The average family of four uses about 2/3s of a ton of water each day. Transferring large volumes of water from the North of England to the South would be a huge engineering project that if feasible would take many years to develop, many years to build and incur a huge amount of investment that would increase customer bills beyond levels that would be found acceptable in the UK. It would also have a negative impact on the environment, both in terms of the actual construction and the impact of abstracting large volumes of water from an area that was previously water plentiful.

There are other ways by which we can increase the amount of water available over the longer term that are already being discussed and considered with OFWAT and the Environment Agency. However, by far the most simple, and effective way to protect the environment and ensure there is enough water for all – whilst causing the least inconvenience to our customers is to reduce consumption.

Our customers use 169 litres of top quality drinking water per person per day – but they only drink two litres of it. That means 167 litres of water is used for other purposes such as - - baths, showers, flushing the loo, washing machines, dishwashers, hosepipes, leisure pools, jet sprays etc. If each person reduced their water consumption by say 5 litres per day, this would have a huge impact on the amount of water available - and most people could do this with just a minor change in lifestyle (such as turning the tap off when cleaning teeth). Water consumption is increasing year on year and each of us has a moral duty to reduce, reuse and recycle the earth's precious resources. As such, we should be looking in the future towards different ways of using water, already many people have water butts in their gardens, there's no reason why we shouldn't look to develop grey water recycling at home (i.e. water from your shower could be used to flush the loo etc).

How can you supply all the new homes proposed to be built in the company's area?

We prepare water resource plans to ensure that there is sufficient water to meet the demands of existing and future domestic water use covering a period of 25 years. These plans do take into account instances of drought and this is why there are statutory measures in place to enable water use to be restricted during periods of extended dry weather and keep water bills as low as possible.

How many reservoirs have we built since the last drought?

No reservoirs have been built since the last drought. We have supported proposals to build new storage reservoirs in the south-east of England but these have been rejected as not necessary at public enquiry in

favour of making better use of existing resources and reducing demand as building new reservoirs would mean higher water prices.

We have been working with other companies to share resources for the future but in the short term the most economic method of balancing supply and demand is to apply restrictions from time to time.

Why are there differences in the restrictions between different water companies?

Each company must carefully consider its own local water resource situation to determine if exceptions can be made. This can only be done locally and not across the board.

Despite occasional stories of it being a 'postcode lottery', the natural water resource situation does not respect these boundaries, and companies have to use their engineering knowledge to get the balance right.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Won't the environment suffer if you keep taking water from rivers and aquifers?

All water companies recognise the need to safeguard the environment and all water abstraction is tightly controlled by the Environment Agency to ensure long-term damage to rivers and aquifers is prevented. Drought Permits and Orders are issued for short periods to ensure long-term damage does not occur.

We have an extensive programme of works which look at the effect of abstraction on local resources in partnership with the Environment Agency. In due course, the Environment Agency may reduce the amount of water we can take from the environment and that may increase water bills.

USEFUL WATER FACTS

Only 1% of the earth's water can be used for drinking.

South East England has 50% less rainfall on average than the rest of the country.

South East England has less water available per head than Morocco, Egypt or Kenya. Source: Environment Agency

20% of clean water used in the home is flushed down the toilet