

# SES Water's policy for offering customer assistance with leakage occurring on privately owned pipework

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This policy covers the leakage, wastage and undue consumption of water occurring on privately owned pipework and water fittings. It covers both external and internal pipework. It does not cover water company owned assets which are dealt with in other policies and procedures. It sets out the assistance that SES will give to customers who have leakage related issues with these assets. A differentiation is made between domestic properties and commercial properties as there are distinct differences to the approach and services that are offered to each. In general, domestic residences will be eligible for free assistance while non-household residences will not, but there are some exceptions to this.

It should be noted this is an assistance policy, detailing the services that we offer to our customers. As these services are offered on assets owned by the customer (or the property owner) there is no obligation for customers to accept our assistance. It should be noted however, that under the Water Industry Act 1991 we do have statutory powers to enforce the repair of leaking assets.

Where SES Water becomes aware of, or locates through survey activity, leakage or the suspected presence of leakage, this policy is enacted.

SES Water reserves the right to withdraw the free assistance on a per property basis or as an entire policy and will maintain complete discretion as to the nature of the intervention (repair or renewal). If this is the case it will be clearly communicated. In the case of a decision to withdraw from an individual property a note will be put on the Oneserve job and on the billing system so that future customer correspondence can refer to this decision.

## 1. Domestic (household) properties

Domestic properties are defined as those where their primary use is as a domestic dwelling. For this policy this matches the eligibility for properties to be included in the non-household market, with those not eligible for this being designated as domestic.

**The first, and a critical stage of this process, is to triage the leaks to decide if they meet the minimum criteria for leakage assistance.**

### **Initial triage to assess eligibility for assistance**

For assistance to be offered the proven or assumed leakage must meet the following criteria:

- The leak must be occurring on pipework belonging to a domestic residence. The definition of which is the occupants use the residence principally as a place to live

- The leak must be assessed by the SES Water Customer Side Leakage team or their designates as having a leak which is substantive enough to be causing damage to the property, the environment or having an adverse effect on overall company level leakage. It should be noted that a higher-than-average customer bill is not reason enough on its own to meet these criteria but it will be taken into consideration when assessing the size of the leak
- The leak must not be occurring within the property or grounds of a property which is deemed as unsafe or a health hazard. This will be at the discretion of the visiting SES Water Customer Side Leakage team. An exception might be made in the event that the inhabitant of the property is deemed to be vulnerable and at greater risk due to the occurrence of leakage as a result of this. The Priority Services Register (PSR) will be used as the basis for this decision and both field and office staff will be trained to make recommendations for new customers to join the PSR as well.
- Have the permission from all interested parties (both direct and third party) to work on and access the assets.
- If the leakage is pinpointed to be occurring in a location underneath a building or permanent structure the default position will be to withdraw assistance, however some discretion will be applied based on a combination of the other eligibility criteria.

Operational and front-line staff will be provided with appropriate guidance and information to inform their decisions on eligibility.

Council or housing association owned and managed properties will be eligible for the scheme but may wish to engage their own contractors to complete the works, the first step should always be to engage the authority to explore the possibility of their contractors doing the work before SES commit to enacting our free repair scheme.

Customers on the SES Water PSR will be prioritised both in terms of priority for repair and when giving consideration to whether the eligibility criteria is met. In addition to this, the on-site field teams along with the Network Operations call handlers will be trained to identify customers who are in a vulnerable position and this information will directly influence the decisions made to offer assistance and the level to which we provide support, as well as potentially adding customers to the PSR.

Assuming these criteria are met then the following assistance will be provided for each of the property groups.

### **1.1. Domestic residences (household properties) – external repairs**

All domestic properties will be provided with a leak location service. Within reason this will not be time limited. This will involve an SES Water specialist technician attending the property to spend time proving and locating the leak. They will require sufficient access to do this and it may require an appointment to be made with the customer to gain access to the property and garden.

All domestic residences that meet the criteria and have a proven leak are eligible for a ‘free supply repair’ on their external pipework, with the following definition:

**Free supply pipe repair** – a repair carried out by SES Water or their contractors at SES Water's expense. The work is done on behalf of and with the customer's consent.

A free repair would include:

- All repairs to external pipework providing reasonable access is given to the pipework and fittings in order to carry out the work
- The cost of all labour
- The cost of all required fittings and parts
- No set limit for time spent in order to repair the leak – although this will remain at the discretion of SES Water and within reasonable limits. Any repair taking longer than three working days will be temporarily paused pending a review from the Customer Side Leakage team who will decide on whether to continue and the best next course of action
- All repairs will involve reinstatement of the surface in the vicinity of the repair location to the best of the abilities of SES Water or our contractors. The area will be made good with suitable permanent reinstatement but it is not guaranteed that a like for like reinstatement will be possible

Immediately following a repair, the property owner will take responsibility for the repaired section of pipework. SES Water will guarantee the repair for a period of six months afterwards to ensure the quality of the workmanship. Thereafter the provision for further leakage assistance will need to be assessed as if it were a new or first-time leakage occurrence and would be subject to the eligibility criteria again.

There are some circumstances where a free repair may not be the best course of action on external pipework. This could be the case if the asset is known to be in extremely poor condition and is therefore likely to fail again immediately after repair, or if it is assessed that a repair is not viable or is uneconomic due to access restrictions. In these circumstances SES Water may offer a 'free supply pipe relay'. Records of pipework found to be in poor condition should be collected and kept within the job management system for future reference when corresponding with customers.

**SES Water has the right to offer a free relay rather than a free repair and is not obliged to offer either at the request of the customer, though this will be appropriately communicated and discussed with them. Free relays will only be offered following consultation with the Customer Side Leakage team.**

**Free supply pipe relay** – a full or partial relay of external pipework up to the point of entry into the property. This work would be carried out by SES Water or its contractors at SES Water's expense. The work is done on behalf of and with the customer's consent.

A free relay would include:

- The relaying of new external pipework in a same/equivalent size providing reasonable access is given to carry out this work
- The cost of all labour (SES Water directly or its chosen contractors)
- The cost of all required fittings and parts

- No set limit for time spent in order to relay the pipe – although this will remain at the discretion of SES Water and within reasonable limits. Any relay taking longer than five working days will be temporarily paused pending a review from the Customer Side Leakage team who will decide on whether to continue and the best next course of action
- All relays will involve reinstatement of the surface in the vicinity of the work to the best of the abilities of SES Water or its contractors. The area will be made good with suitable permanent reinstatement but it is not guaranteed that a like for like reinstatement will be possible.

Immediately following the pipe being relayed the customer will take ownership and responsibility for the new supply pipe and will be liable for any further failures or leakage on the pipe from that point onwards. SES Water will offer a six-month guarantee to cover any immediate defects due to poor installation that leads to leakage or other supply-related issues. In this circumstance SES Water would arrange a revisit to resolve the problem at its expense.

### **Domestic premises (household properties) – shared supplies**

Where a leak or wastage is occurring on a shared supply pipe then it is the responsibility for all properties who are served by that pipe to ensure the leak is repaired. Under the terms of this policy SES Water will offer free leak repair assistance in accordance with the eligibility criteria as long as at least one of the properties served by the supply pipe is a domestic residence.

The assistance offered will not differ to that provided to a single supply. However, in order to proceed with the repair SES Water needs written or emailed agreement from all property owners or persons responsible, on the shared supply to carry out the work. The agreement from all parties will extend to providing the required access to carry the repair or relay. SES Water will in turn commit to providing adequate communication to all parties throughout the repair.

### **1.2. Domestic premises (household properties) – internal repairs**

All domestic properties meeting the criteria will be provided with a leak location service to include the diagnosis of internal leakage or plumbing losses. Within reason this will not be time limited but should be completed in one visit. This will involve an SES Water technician or its chosen contractors attending the property to spend time proving and locating the leak. They will require sufficient access to do this and it may require an appointment to be made with the customer to gain access to the property. SES Water makes no guarantee it will be able to either prove or locate a leak but will use all available tools and resources to do this. SES Water or its contractors will only access part of the property that is assessed as safe to do so.

All domestic residences that meet the criteria for free leak assistance and have a proven leak are eligible for a ‘free internal repair’ on their internal pipework or fittings, with the following definition:

**Free internal repair** – a repair carried out by SES Water or its contractors at SES Water's expense. The work is done on behalf of and with the customer's consent.

All customers who receive a free internal repair service will be offered and encouraged to participate in a free water efficiency audit. This will include a home audit of all water using appliances and fittings in the home and the completion of a survey with the customer to help them understand their water consumption habits. The aim of this audit is to help the customer better understand their water usage and to help them save money on their bills by adjusting their water use.

**The following is included:**

- Repair of dripping taps to include washer changes to conventional style (non-ceramic taps)
- A free new tap fitting service to replace old taps found to be leaking. The customer/home owner will need to source and purchase the new taps and all required fittings themselves and make these available
- Repair of leaks on fittings to showers – providing no specific new parts are needed
- Repair of faulty ball valves in toilet cisterns or in loft tanks (provided suitable access is given)
- Repairs to drop valve style toilets. Including replacement parts if these are required
- Repairs to any seeping or dripping pipework providing this can be made reasonably accessible at the time of the visit
- All labour costs
- No set limit for time spent in order to repair the leak – although this should be within a single visit and will remain at the discretion of SES Water or its contractors and within reasonable limits

**The following is not included**

- Repair to central heating systems, including boilers and radiators
- Repairs to garden watering systems, which could otherwise be disconnected from the water supply
- Repairs to any non-essential water fittings, including pipework, fittings or pumps to swimming pools, hot tubs or ornamental ponds
- Repairs to ceramic style taps (although a free replacement or repair service will be offered if new taps or parts are made available by the customer)
- Any repairs requiring access to locations of the property, which are either deemed unsafe or would require substantive safety equipment to gain access to
- Any repairs to rectify an issue caused by work carried out by another contractor on behalf of the customer. In this circumstance the customer/home owner should re-engage their contractor or use their insurance

Should SES Water or its contractors be unable to carry out a repair under the terms of this policy they will commit to offering advice to the customer/home owner about the best course of action to take. If appropriate this may include the provision of a non-obligation quotation from SES Water's contractor to complete the works. If the customer chooses to engage its

contractor on this basis, they will form a separate contract with the contractor and SES Water will no longer be involved other than to receive notification of the leak repair and closure of the waste notification process.

At the end of an internal leakage investigation if the leak cannot be located and/or repaired under the terms of the assistance scheme then the SES Water representative or contractor can take two actions:

1. Recommend no further action – this means the leak is deemed insignificant/non traceable. This will be left with the customer to resolve should they wish to
2. Issue a Waste Notice – this means the leak is deemed significant but as it falls out of the terms of the assistance scheme it will require the customer or other third party to further investigate and enact a repair within the Waste Notice period detailed below

### **Waste Notification and enforcement of the Water Industry Act 1991 – domestic properties**

As a statutory undertaker SES Water reserves the right to issue Waste Notice documentation as a means of enforcement of the timely repair of proven leakage and wastage on customers/home owners' property or pipework. Waste Notices will be used on the following basis:

- They will not be issued immediately to customers/home owners, providing they engage with SES Water to get the leak fixed. Customers will first be asked to accept the offer of leakage assistance by response to information letters sent by the Customer Side Leakage team following the leak being proven. Where there is eligibility for leak assistance and providing the customer/ homeowner takes prompt action and allows SES Water access (usually within 14 days of notification) then a Waste Notice will not be issued. The customer can:
  - Engage with SES Water to receive assistance including the free repair or renewal service, subject to eligibility
  - Engage their own contractor or insurer to carry out the works and report completion back to SES Water so it can check that the issue has been resolved
  - Prove the supply is no longer required and formally request SES Water visit to cap off the unwanted supply
- If the customer does not engage following the first information letter, they will then be issued with a second follow-up letter which will give a further seven-day response period. The same options will be available to the customer during this period. If the customer still ignores SES Water's communication and refuses the assistance scheme then SES Water will proceed to issue a formal Waste Notice.
- Waste Notices will be sent to the premises where leakage is occurring. Where there is a landlord responsible for the property, SES Water will endeavour to make contact directly providing the appropriate contract details have been provided. Otherwise it is the responsibility of the tenant to inform their landlord of the notification and stress the need for action to be taken. This includes properties that are owned and managed by housing associations or councils. If a Waste Notice is issued, SES Water may choose to enact any of the following:
  - Remove the eligibility for free repair or relay assistance
  - Enact statutory powers to force the leak to be repaired

- Take legal action to enforce the repair, against the homeowner or persons responsible for the upkeep of the property
- Install a water meter and move the customer onto a metered tariff so they pay for the water being wasted
- Consider restricting the supply to the property using a low flow, or flow limiting device
- Remove the eligibility for customers to have a leak allowance applied if and when the leak is fixed
- In the case of a leak being proven on a shared supply pipe to multiple properties then Customer Side Leakage information letters will be sent to all premises known to be on that supply. It is then the shared responsibility of all properties on the supply to engage with SES Water, although it is acceptable for a spokesperson to be nominated to represent the group provided that any work is agreed in writing by all properties either by post or by email
- Formal Waste Notices will take the form of an official legal notification, which details SES Water's rights and statutory obligation under the Water Industry Act 1991 to enforce action to remedy leakage or waste occurring on a premise within its supply area
- SES Water reserves the right to move straight to statutory powers or any of the measures above if, in its professional opinions believes the leak to be causing damage or risk to health to the property itself or to neighbouring properties and their inhabitants. In extreme circumstances of damage or risk to health, SES Water can turn supplies off as long as when it does so it will make adequate provision for an alternative water supply while the supply is off and the property remains occupied
- In the case of shared supplies, if one or more of the properties on the supply fails to give the required permissions, then all properties will be liable for the consequences of non-compliance with the Waste Notice

## 2. Commercial (non- household) properties

A commercial property is designated by the fact its primary use is non-domestic. SES Water's definition for this policy matches the eligibility for properties to be in the non-household market for their water supplier. This includes communal areas to domestic dwellings such as flats and apartment blocks.

Under the terms of the policy these properties are **not eligible** for assistance and generally would not receive any financial support towards the cost of repair or for replacement pipework. There are however some exceptions and some of these are listed below. It remains at the complete discretion of SES Water as to the eligibility for leak assistance.

### Exceptions – free leak assistance offered in some circumstances

- Charitable or voluntary organisations
- Schools and other buildings offering youth services
- Hospitals and other healthcare facilities where there is not deemed to be adequate funds to enact the repair
- Any other non-domestic property SES Water deems suitable for free leak assistance

All commercial properties will be provided with a free leak location service should they choose to accept SES Water's offer to do so. Within reason this will not be time limited but will be completed within a single visit. This will involve an SES Water technician or its chosen contractors attending the property to spend time proving and locating the leak. They will require sufficient access to do this and it may require an appointment to be made with the customer to gain access to the property and any privately owned land. SES Water makes no guarantee it will be able to either prove or locate a leak but will use all available tools and resources at its disposal to do this.

Where a leak is proven on a commercial premises the property owner will be issued with a standard formal Waste Notice.

### Waste Notification and enforcement of the Water Industry Act 1991 – commercial properties

As a statutory undertaker SES Water reserves the right to issue Waste Notice documentation as a means of enforcement of the timely repair of proven leakage and wastage on a commercial premises. Waste Notices will be used on the following basis:

- Waste Notices will be sent to the premises where leakage is occurring. Where there is a landlord responsible for the property, SES Water will endeavour to make contact directly, providing the appropriate contract details have been provided. Otherwise, it is the responsibility of the tenant to inform their landlord of the notification and stress the need for action to be taken. This includes properties that are owned and managed by housing associations or councils



- The retailer will be notified a waste notice has been served in accordance with the regulations
- Waste Notices will take the form of an official legal notification, which details SES Water's rights and statutory obligation under the Water Industry Act 1991 to enforce action to remedy leakage or waste occurring on a premises within its supply area
- All Waste Notices will state a 14-day period in which the customer must either:
  - Repair the leak themselves and report completion back to SES Water so it can check that the issue has been resolved
  - Engage their own contractor or insurer to carry out the works and report completion back to SES Water so that it can check the issue has been resolved
  - Prove the supply is no longer required and formally request SES Water visit to cap off the unwanted supply
- If SES Water fails to receive any return correspondence within the 14-day period set out on the Waste Notice then they will issue a second "Final Notification of Waste". This will reinforce the messages of the Waste Notice and give a further seven days in which the customer/ property owner needs to ensure the repair is done
- If SES Water still does not receive any return correspondence after the initial seven-day period then it will take the following action
  - Send a further notification to the retailer
  - Remove any eligibility for free repair or relay assistance
  - Enact statutory powers to force the leak to be repaired
  - Take legal action to enforce the repair, against the property owner or persons responsible for the upkeep of the property
  - If not already there, install a water meter and move the customer onto a metered tariff so they pay for the water being wasted
  - Restrict the supply to the property using a low flow, or flow limiting device
  - Turn off the supply and temporarily cap it
- SES Water reserves the right to move straight to any of the measures above if it, in its professional opinion, believes the leak to be causing damage or risk to health to the property itself or to neighbouring properties and their inhabitants. In extreme circumstances of damage or risk to health, SES Water can turn supplies off without the need for notice to be given, but if this was enacted then suitable adequate provision would be made for an alternative water supply