Maintaining the quality of water in your property

Water quality factsheet 6

At South West Water we supply water to some of the highest standards in the world. Rigorous processes and testing ensure that the water that reaches your home and workplace meets all the regulatory standards.

This factsheet explains the things you can do to make sure that your water stays fresh and free from any kind of impurities once it reaches your home or workplace.

If you own a second home or are only occasionally at your home, all of the following precautions are particularly relevant.

We take water quality seriously at South West Water. This is one of a series of factsheets about water quality – you can find more factsheets at southwestwater.co.uk

Simple ways to maintain water quality at home

There are some simple things you can do to make sure that water in your home or workplace remains at the same high quality as when it leaves our water treatment works.
These include:

- using the cold kitchen tap for drinking and cooking water
- keeping taps and fittings clean
- keeping any water filters in good condition
- maintaining your cold water storage tank
- keeping your plumbing and pipework in good condition and only using approved, high-quality fittings

Use the cold kitchen tap for drinking and cooking water

You should use the tap closest to where the cold water supply enters your house for your drinking and cooking water. This is usually the kitchen tap.

The main reason for using this tap is that the water it provides will be fresh and will not have stood in your pipework or storage tank for a long time.

If the water has been sitting in your system for several hours or overnight, you may want to let the tap run for a while before you use it for drinking or cooking. To avoid wasting any water, you can fill up a jug and use that water for watering plants.

Avoid drinking or cooking with water from the hot water system

Avoid drinking water from the hot water plumbing because it's more likely to:

- contain traces of dissolved metals that can give your tap water a metallic taste
- allow conditions where bacteria can grow.

Avoid drinking or cooking with water from your cold water storage tank.

Avoid drinking water fed from your cold-water storage tank, because the water is more likely to become impure while sitting in the tank.

Keeping stored water in good quality

We add very small and safe amounts of chlorine to your water to remove harmful bacteria. This chlorine steadily evaporates from the water if the water is left exposed to air.

If you do store any water for use later, keep it in the fridge in a covered container and make sure you change the water every day.

Keep water filters in good condition

If you use a water filter jug or inline water filter system, make sure you follow the manufacturer's instructions. Filtering drinking water removes the chlorine, and this increases the potential for bacteria to grow. To help prevent bacteria from growing, you should:

- keep the jug in the fridge, away from heat and light
- change the water at least daily
- clean the jug frequently
- change the filter cartridges when recommended by the manufacturer.

Maintain your cold water storage tank

If you have a cold water storage tank in your house, it's important that you keep the tank in good condition. Make sure:

- the tank has a lid that is securely sealed to prevent impurities such as airborne bacteria and dust from entering
- there is an air gap between the surface of the water and the inlet pipe when the tank is full – this stops the possibility of impurities getting from your tank back into the main water supply
- the tank is flushed out and refilled if the house is empty for more than a month.

Maintain your cold water storage tank

Chlorine tastes and odours

If you notice a faint taste or odour of chlorine in your water, it could be from the chlorine we have added.

This taste or odour is normal and will not harm you. Heating water can make the chlorine odour worse, so you may notice the taste or odour more when you run a bath or take a shower. Even though the odour may be stronger when you heat the water, it is still safe to use.

Other reasons for chlorine, antiseptic, metallic or bitter tastes and odours

If you're getting a very strong chlorine, antiseptic, metallic or bitter odour or taste, take a look at Water Quality Factsheet 1 - Tastes and Odours for some of the most common causes and how you can try to eliminate the tastes and odours.

Fuel or oil odours and tastes

Oily odours or tastes are usually caused because an oil, such as petrol, diesel, kerosene, or paint thinners, has been spilt and has then leached into your water supply pipe.

If you suspect any of this has happened, do not drink the water. Call us straight away on 0344 346 2020 (minicom 0800 169 9965).

If fuel or oil is spilt on, or near to, any underground water pipes, it's important that these are cleaned up immediately so they don't contaminate the water. Replacing pipework can be expensive, so cleaning up the spills before they're allowed to enter the pipework can help to minimise costs.

Keeping your kitchen and bathroom free from bacteria

Pink or black slime on kitchen and bathroom fittings is likely to be caused by bacterial and fungal spores. The warm, moist air in the kitchen or bathroom encourages the spores to grow. You can remove these with a household cleaner. Use an old toothbrush for hard-to-reach areas.

Where possible, try keeping the area as clean and dry as possible to discourage the spores from growing back.

Where can I get more information?

You can get more information about water quality on:

- our website at southwestwater.co.uk/waterquality
- Water UK's website at water.org.uk/Looking_after_water_in_your_home