

What is a Private Water Supply?

A guide for users

Introduction

If your household is not connected to the mains supply, you will most probably have what is known as a private water supply (PWS). If you do have a PWS, this document contains some information to help you:

- Understand what a PWS is
- What you can do to maintain it so that it provides you with clean water
- Who you might ask for technical help, water quality testing, and other available support
- Be aware that **it is your responsibility to manage your PWS, ensure that your water is safe to drink, and understand any risks to it**

If you are on a domestic supply serving fewer than 50 households, and your property is not registered as a business, you will likely be on what is called an unregulated, or “Type B” supply. Businesses and larger communities served by one water source or abstraction point are regulated (Type A), and the local Council has a responsibility to check these annually.

What does your PWS involve?

Your PWS system takes water from a source to the taps in your property. This involves different parts, each requiring some checking and maintenance.

- The water you use is most likely piped from somewhere on your or a neighbour’s property. Sometimes this abstraction point can be some distance away, perhaps on land used for agriculture, forestry or other developments.
- Your water will normally be pumped from an abstraction point such as a well, borehole, spring, reservoir, loch, or river. Water piped from this source may supply just your property or be shared with other households.
- In between this source and your house (often in an outbuilding) there will probably be a filtration and sterilisation system to clean your water and make it safe to drink. Depending on the quality of the water coming from your source these might include a pH corrector, a UV steriliser to kill bacteria, a particulate filter to capture sediment, and others depending on need.

Looking after your water supply

- Make sure that you know where your abstraction point is, and ideally the route of pipework to your property. This is often not obvious as it is often on someone else’s land and may not be mapped on the deeds to your property.
- Once you know where it is you can more easily check its condition, identify the source of any leaks, and arrange any maintenance needed. Please note that if you have a borehole,

these tend to have an electricity supply to power the pump at the bottom, so there will also be underground cabling.

- It is important that the abstraction point and surrounding area is well protected from contaminants from surrounding land-use (e.g. farming, forestry, construction), and to check and maintain any protection in place (well caps, fencing, etc.).
- Check your filtration system regularly, and particularly if your water tastes, smells, or looks different to normal. For example, particulate filters clog up and need regular replacing, UV lamps do not last forever, and pH correctors lose their ability to neutralise water over time.
- While you might be able to carry out some of the maintenance yourself (such as replacing a particulate filter), in many cases you will need to contact local tradespeople experienced in working on PWS. As well as maintaining the system to keep your water safe for use they should be able to check and replace other components such as water pumps and pipework. They may also be able to advise on other issues such as the location of your abstraction point, or alternatives to your existing one if it is unreliable.
- PWS maintenance, water quality testing, and improvements, all involve some costs, so you might consider putting some money aside every month towards this.

Is your water supply reliable?

- It is important to know if the amount of water your system supplies is reliable. For example, things like drought and changes to drainage or land management can result in less water being available to you.
- If your supply does run low, or you suspect that it might do so (e.g. by monitoring the water depth in a shallow well), consider reducing your household consumption by, for example: installing water butts to collect rainwater to flush toilets, or having briefer or less frequent showers.
- If you have neighbours on PWS, they may be able to share advice based on their experience.

Responsibilities and Regulations

- Even if your water tastes OK it can still cause risks to your health and **ensuring that your water is safe to drink and meets water quality standards is your responsibility**. To help with this, your Council will have an Environmental Health Officer (EHO) who has a duty to collect and analyse a sample from your supply if you request one, for a fee. Tests check for contamination by bugs (bacteria etc.), metals, chemicals, along with pH levels, cloudiness, and colour. If your water fails against any of these then you need to take remedial action prior to re-testing.
- If your abstraction point is on land not owned by you (e.g. in a neighbour's field) you have the right of access to check and maintain it. However, it is advisable to introduce yourself so that you can liaise over any needs so as not to disrupt their activities.
- See [Owning or using a private water supply - mygov.scot](#) for more details.

Support to help manage your PWS:

Local Councils Environmental Health Officers are the first point of contact for PWS users wanting support and you can find their contact details on your Council's Environmental Health webpage.

- As well as testing your water quality your Council may also risk-assess your supply, from source to tap, whether this is requested or not. These risk assessments cover a wider range of potential issues than just water quality.
- You are responsible for your emergency water provision if your supply runs out. However, in some cases (e.g. due to drought or frost) Scottish Water may supply bottled water at Council specified locations. Contact your EHO for advice.

Repairs, maintenance, upgrades:

Identify local tradespeople experienced in working on PWS for installation, maintenance, repair, and advice. While Councils cannot recommend contractors, Watersafe provides contact details of approved providers who may be able to help – but make sure they have PWS expertise: [Find a Local Approved Plumber | WaterSafe](#)

Financial assistance:

You may be eligible for the Scottish Government’s Private Water Supply Grant, currently worth £800, via your EHO. Your Council may be able to provide hardship grants towards necessary upgrades for your PWS, and advise on possible loans or other sources of support.

Regulatory advice:

- Your Council EHO is your first point of contact. Check that your PWS is registered with them.
- The Scottish Government website has further information on PWS advice, support, and regulations: [Owning or using a private water supply - mygov.scot](#).
- The Drinking Water Quality Regulator website has also detailed information about regulations: DWQR PWS

Further information and contact

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