

## **Customers applying for financial assistance under the Vulnerable Groups Regulations (WaterSure) – 2007-08**

### **Background**

'WaterSure' is the brand name for the Vulnerable Groups Scheme in England and Wales, which was introduced by Government regulations<sup>1</sup> in April 2000. It allows certain household customers with water meters to pay a capped water bill.

The scheme is designed to help people who might otherwise worry about turning on their taps – possibly compromising their health and the health of others – because of concerns about affording their bill.

Details of the scheme can be found [here](#).

### **Number of households successfully applying for assistance under WaterSure**

Every year, we collect information from each water company on the number of households applying for, and successfully receiving, assistance offered under WaterSure. As customers are required to apply for the tariff each year, the number of successful applications broadly equates to the number of households receiving assistance. The [table](#) below sets out the numbers for 2006-07 and 2007-08.

In England and Wales the number of customers successfully applying for assistance has risen by nearly **50%** in the past year, from **16,212** to **24,121**. Companies explain that a number of factors have contributed to this increase, including:

- more households becoming metered;
- rising bills;
- customer-facing staff improving their understanding of the scheme, including through specialised training to equip staff with the knowledge and skills required to meet the needs of these customers; and
- improved awareness through promotion of the WaterSure brand name.

### **Good practice and future promotion**

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<sup>1</sup> The Water Industry (Charges) (Vulnerable Groups) Regulations 1999 SI 1999/3441, amended by SI 2000/519, SI 2003/552, SI 2005/59. Whilst the regulations only apply to companies operating wholly or mainly in England, the two companies operating in Wales have introduced equivalent tariffs on a voluntary basis.

Each year, in addition to collecting details of the number of households applying for WaterSure, we ask companies to tell us how they promote the scheme. All companies now include details of WaterSure either on or with their billing literature, and also on their website. Most also publicise the scheme in a number of other ways, for example:

- distributing leaflets to organisations such as Citizens' Advice, debt advice agencies, local councils, housing associations, council neighbourhood offices, libraries, charities, hospitals, GPs and medical centres;
- poster campaigns in public places such as Department for Work and Pensions offices, playgroups and schools;
- including details of the scheme in new customer welcome packs;
- placing articles in regional publications targeted at the elderly or disabled;
- promoting WaterSure on reminder notices; and
- visiting Citizens' Advice Bureaux and other advice agencies to promote awareness to agency staff.

Many companies now apply the scheme more flexibly, for example by allowing customers to simply confirm that their circumstances have not changed, rather than making them complete the full application process each year<sup>2</sup>.

We continue to encourage companies to do all they can to make sure that customers who could benefit financially from WaterSure are aware of the scheme.

Any household customer who thinks that they may be eligible for help under the WaterSure scheme should contact their [local water company](#) for further details and an application form, or the [Consumer Council for Water](#) (CCWater) for further information on eligibility.

**Ofwat**  
**Service and Performance Team**  
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<sup>2</sup> Proof of benefit entitlement will still be required.

**Number of households applying for and successfully receiving WaterSure – 2006-07 and 2007-08**

Company	Total number of applications		% change in number of applications between 2006-07 and 2007-08 <sup>1</sup>	Total number of successful applications		% change in successful applications between 2006-07 and 2007-08 <sup>1</sup>
	2006-07	2007-08		2006-07	2007-08	
Anglian	1,530	3,836	151	904	3,385	274
Dŵr Cymru	699	1,068	53	580	899	55
Northumbrian (incl. Essex & Suffolk)	1,023	1,232	20	898	1,077	20
Severn Trent	1,791	2,887	61	1,508	2,385	58
South West	3,915	5,964	52	3,857	5,837	51
Southern	281	197	-30	280	197	-30
Thames	2,522	2,741	9	2,053	2,333	14
United Utilities	2,085	3,468	66	1,565	2,286	46
Wessex	823	899	9	751	837	11
Yorkshire	1,714	2,136	25	1,663	2,090	26
Bournemouth & West Hampshire	320	341	7	222	274	23
Bristol	529	559	6	478	511	7
Cambridge	139	137	-1	108	128	19
Dee Valley	39	74	90	36	73	103
Folkestone & Dover	118	203	72	106	176	66
Mid Kent	77	210	173	41	152	271
Portsmouth	34	52	53	30	43	43
South East	114	157	38	102	97	-5
South Staffordshire	246	322	31	198	259	31
Sutton & East Surrey	94	113	20	91	110	21
Tendring Hundred	500	528	6	425	468	10
Three Valleys	332	537	62	316	504	59
<b>Industry</b>	<b>18,925</b>	<b>27,661</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>16,212</b>	<b>24,121</b>	<b>49</b>

<sup>1</sup> Percentage changes rounded to zero decimal places.