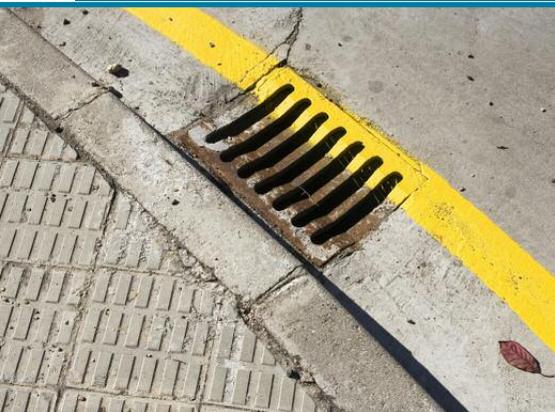


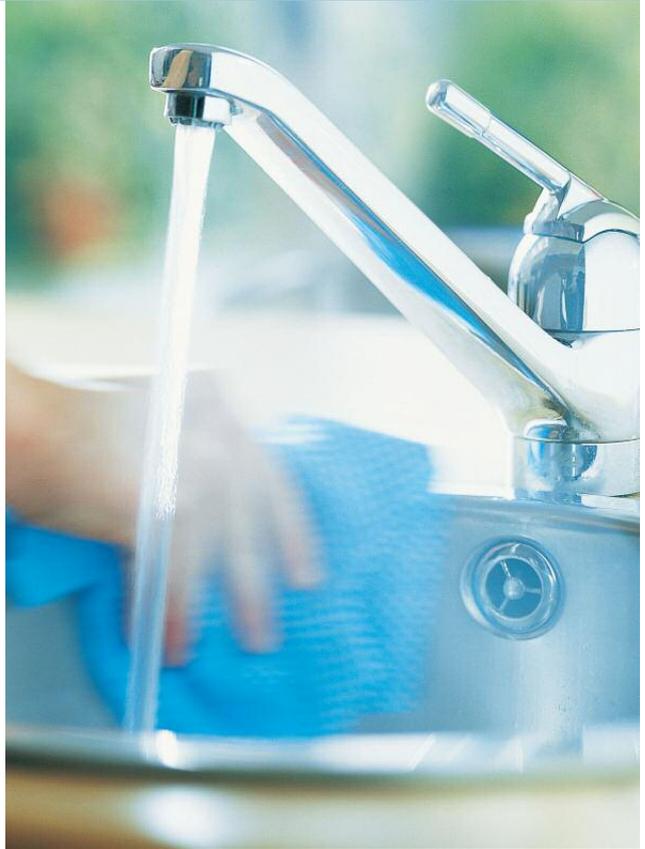
Water and billing agents?



Information for households in England and Wales

Water today, water tomorrow

OFWAT



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About billing agent services

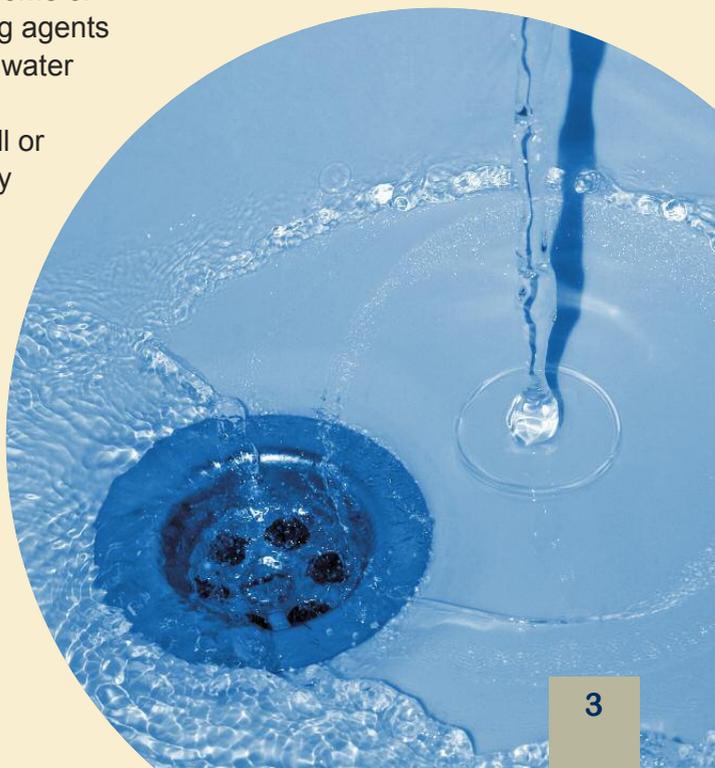
Most people in England and Wales get their water delivered and wastewater taken away from their home by licensed water companies. They cannot choose their supplier for water or wastewater like they can for other things like food or electricity.

There are unlicensed businesses that may try to sell you water and wastewater services. These businesses are usually called ‘billing agents’.

They may phone you at home or knock on your door. Billing agents may offer to contact your water company for you to get a discount on your water bill or get you a refund of money you have already paid.

Billing agents will charge you money for doing these things.

No one checks the services that billing agents provide. And quite often, the services they give you are things you could do for free by speaking to your water company. So you need to be careful before agreeing to buy services from billing agents. If you feel uncomfortable about the way that they are selling their services to you, end the call or ask them to leave. It is a criminal offence for them to refuse this.



Below, we set out some top tips for dealing with billing agents and your water company. You can also read one water customer's story about using a billing agent.

1. Ask questions and get enough information to help you decide whether or not to sign up to receive a billing agent's services.

- What actions will the billing agent take on your behalf?
- How will the billing agent charge you for its services, and how much will it charge?
- Will you get full written details of what is being offered before being asked to pay?
- Can you have time to consider and be able to contact the billing agent again in your own time?
- What are your rights to cancel? When can you do it? Are there still fees to pay?
- What happens to what you have paid if the billing agent goes out of business and does not do what they promised – for example, investigate the refund or pass on payments to your water company?

2. Contact your water company before signing up to a billing agent.

Ask your water company about:

- changing how often you pay;
- helping you check whether you are entitled to



a refund if you are not using some services – for example, surface water drainage services;

- letting you know whether you would be better off on a water meter;
- letting you know about any special tariffs you may be entitled to; and
- providing more support if you are in debt.

3. Get free advice.

Use our list of selected helplines to check what free advice is available from other organisations about your rights as a consumer. See pages 10 and 11.

John's story

John* is 83 years old. As part of his normal water and wastewater bill from his water company, John pays for 'surface water drainage'. This is where rain falling on someone's home drains into the sewer. Some properties are built so that rainwater soaks into the ground through a gravel 'soakaway' system, or it may go straight into a river rather than the company sewers. So people like John are charged for surface water drainage until they tell the company that rain falling on their home does not go into the sewer.

John was called at home by a billing agent. They told him that he was entitled to a refund from his water company. They told John this was because rain falling on his home was not draining into the water company's sewer, so he should not be paying for surface water drainage. The billing agent offered to speak to the water company for John to get him his refund.

John agreed and the billing agent asked him for his bank account details. John believed this was so the billing agent could send him his refund. In fact, the billing agent used John's bank details to charge him £99. This was before the billing agent had spoken to the company.



It turned out later that the billing agent had not checked before speaking to John whether rain falling on his home was draining into the water company's sewers. So John ended up paying an extra £99 to a billing agent to do some paperwork. Something John, or someone he knew well and trusted, could have done for free by speaking to his water company.

* Not his real name.

Useful contact details and information

Government and other organisations

Name	Who they are	Contact details
Consumer Council for Water (CCWater)	Watchdog for customers of water companies	Phone 0121 345 1000 They have offices in different areas of the country. You can find your nearest one on their website at www.ccwater.org.uk
Citizens Advice Consumer Service	Free service to help people sort out their legal, money and other problems	Phone 0844 111 444 (England) or 0844 702 020 (Wales) They have offices in England and Wales. You can find your nearest one on their website at www.adviceguide.org.uk
Insolvency Service	Free information on insolvency and redundancy legislation and procedures	Phone 0845 602 9848, or visit their website at www.bis.gov.uk/insolvency
Trading Standards	Investigates and punishes businesses that break customer protection rules	You should contact Citizens Advice. They will decide if they should contact Trading Standards. You can find out about what they do on their website at www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/advice/
Money Advice Trust	Charity to help people tackle their debts and look after their money	Visit their website at www.moneyadvicetrust.org
gov.uk (the new name for DirectGov)	Government website that gives you information on government and services – like using the small claims court	Visit their website at www.gov.uk/consumer-protection-rights

Selected helplines

Name	Who they are	Contact details
Age UK	Charity for older people	Phone 0800 169 6565, or visit their website at www.ageuk.org.uk
Debt Advice Foundation	Charity that gives debt advice and education	Phone 0800 043 40 50, or visit their website at www.debtadvicefoundation.org
Debt Support Trust	A charity giving debt advice in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland	Phone 0800 085 0226, or visit their website at www.debtsupporttrust.org.uk
Family Action	Charity that gives services to disadvantaged and socially isolated families	Visit their website at www.family-action.org.uk
Gingerbread	Charity for single parents	Phone 0808 802 0925, or visit their website at www.gingerbread.org.uk
Money Advice Service	Independent advice service that helps people manage their money	Phone 0300 500 5000, or visit their website at www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk
National Debtline	Offers debt advice for people living in different parts of the country	Phone 0808 808 4000, or visit their website at www.mymoneysteps.org
StepChange	Charity that provides advice on reducing debts	Phone 0800 138 1111, or visit their website at www.stepchange.org

Licensed water companies

Companies that sell water and wastewater services

Anglian Water
Dŵr Cymru
Northumbrian Water
Severn Trent Water
Southern Water
South West Water
Thames Water
United Utilities
Wessex Water
Yorkshire Water

Companies that sell water services only

AFW Affinity Water (formerly Veolia Water)
BRL Bristol Water
CAM Cambridge Water (part of South Staffs Water)
CHL Cholderton & District Water
DVW Dee Valley Water
ESK Essex & Suffolk Water
HPL Hartlepool Water (part of Anglian Water)
PRT Portsmouth Water
SBW Sembcorp Bournemouth Water
SES Sutton & East Surrey Water
SEW South East Water
SST South Staffs Water

Small companies that sell water and wastewater services

Albion Water
Independent Water
Networks
SSE Water
Peel Water Networks
Veolia Water Projects

Small companies that some businesses can choose from

Anglian Water Business (formerly Osprey Water Services)
Avon Valley Water
Kelda Water (formerly YorWater)
Scottish Water Business Stream
Severn Trent Services (formerly Severn Trent Water Select)
Source for Business
Thames Water Commercial Services
United Utilities Water Sales

Ofwat (The Water Services Regulation Authority) is a non-ministerial government department. We are responsible for making sure that the water sector in England and Wales provides customers with a good quality and efficient service at a fair price.



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