

Draft joint best practice guidance

Enforcing outstanding misconnections

Aim of Guidance

- To provide a consistent approach to dealing with misconnections across London and thereby raise awareness of the problem and remedial action.
- Through working in partnership resources can be targeted effectively and a joint understanding of processes be achieved and
- Achieve an overall reduction in pollution events pertaining to misconnections in London.

1. Background

- 1.1 Pollution of rivers and other watercourses is often associated with factories and industrial sources. However, many of the pollution events within the Thames region are caused by misconnections to drains within domestic premises. The misconnections largely arise through individuals installing domestic appliances without understanding the sewerage system. Many homes have separate drains for surface and foul water but homeowners are often unaware whether they are living in an area with separate or combined systems.
- 1.2 The direct connection of toilet, sink and home appliances to a surface water system introduces organic and inorganic matter including phosphates and nitrates into the watercourse where the surface water sewer discharges. This encourages the growth of sewage fungus and can have a detrimental effect on aquatic life through oxygen depletion.
- 1.3 Thames Water estimates that up to one in ten properties in London are misconnected. In the worst affected areas this maybe even higher. In 2002/3. Thames Water investigated 1100 misconnections which affected 42 watercourses in London.
- 1.4 Thames Water is undertaking a joint project with the Environment Agency to highlight the problem and tackle the root cause. This project will be targeting DIY and white good manufacturers, organisations that provide training for plumbers and the construction industry.

2. Procedure

- 2.1 Thames Water is made aware of a pollution event either from direct complaints or through the Environment Agency and is responsible for identifying the local sewerage system and potential properties that may be linked to the incident. Thames Water's environmental protection team is responsible for the management of misconnections.

- 2.2 When Thames Water is preparing to commence a pollution tracing investigation, they will inform the local environmental health practitioner (EHP) of the area of:
- predicted timescales of the investigation and
 - likely number of properties that will be misconnected based on up to 10% of properties being misconnected.
- 2.3 Thames Water will undertake the initial investigation of the properties in the identified area.
- 2.4 Once a misconnection or fault has been identified, the property owner will be informed verbally and then a standard letter sent by Thames Water requesting that the homeowners reply within 14 days with regard to their plan to undertake the corrective work. If no response is received after 14 days, Thames Water will send a second letter advising the owner that if no contact is received within the next 14 days the matter will be passed to the local EHP.
- 2.5 The environmental protection team of Thames Water will pass the property details to the local EHO with the following information:
- Property Address
 - Owner/Occupier if known
 - Contact details if known
 - Specific details of misconnected appliance giving location in property
 - Date found and details of any follow up letters/visits
- 2.6 Properties will be passed to the EHP in manageable batches.
- 2.7 The EHP will only deal with properties where Thames Water have been unable to gain access or been unable to rectify the misconnection.
- The EHP will undertake an initial visit to further advise the owners of the misconnections and remedial work that is required. The EHP will send a standard access letter if unable to gain access on the first visit. After three attempts at access the EHP will apply for a Warrant of Entry to carry out the advisory visit and secure remediation. The EHP shall keep Thames Water informed of any such action.
- 2.8 If the home owner fails to undertake any necessary remedial work to rectify the misconnection the EHP shall take enforcement action under Section 59 Building Act 1984.
- 2.9 Thames Water provides a monthly update to the Environment Agency and so will require an update from the EHP by the 6th of each month.

3. Consultation

This is a draft document. If you have any suggestions for inclusion or issue that you wish to table, please refer them to Sharon Smith at CIEH in the first instance.

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