

# Factsheet



## Cracked Water Mains Pipe

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Water mains pipes supply buildings with water directly from water service provider. Water mains in the UK are generally laid underground with pipes running under the public highways (roads).

The water mains installed under the public highway vary in diameter dependant on the number of properties they serve. Water pressure varies region by region dependant on the pressure with which water is pumped into the pipes by the water supplier. It is known fact that in areas where water mains are aged the water supplier often turns down water pressure to reduce the likelihood of a water mains pipe springing a leak.

The pressure of the water that reaches your dwelling will reduce depending on the number of stories above ground the incoming water mains has to rise. Water pressure will also be reduced by each spur off the mains entry pipe into a property. Typically an incoming water mains pipe that serves a dwelling will be 25mm blue plastic pipe. Before plastic pipes became commonplace water mains used to be laid in lead or iron pipework, it is now known that lead pipework can provide health risks and iron pipework is prone to rusting so not a desired material either.

The typical points of entry for a water main are underneath a floor slab. Water mains pipes may directly feed appliances or feed directly into a water storage tanks/cistern installed at attic or roof level. Where water storage tanks/cisterns are installed at high level then appliances are gravity fed from the stored water as opposed to mains fed from the incoming water mains. This may be advantageous in areas where water pressure is particularly low or where a dwelling is at high level as water pressure will significantly reduce say at 3rd or 4th floor levels in a building.



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Water pressure can be boosted by pumping systems but pressurised systems that can be installed directly onto a mains in-let are expensive. Most pumping systems require some form of water storage tank. This can be problematic in small flats where space is unavailable.

## Liability For Repairs To a Water Mains

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The liability for repairs to a leaking water mains depends on where in the mains the leak arises. The leak could be the responsibility of:

- The water supplier
- The Freeholder/Management Company with costs recoverable via service charge contributions
- An individual lessee
  
- In the kitchen:- washing machines, dishwashers, kitchen sinks
- In the bathroom/shower room:- baths, toilets, wash hand basins, bidets, showers
- In the loft:- cold water storage tanks, central heating expansion tanks
- In the airing cupboard:- immersion heaters, hot water cylinders
- The boiler itself However, there are 2 distinctly different types of leaks:
- Mains pressure water leaks
- Outlet pipe leaks See Factsheets MF010 & MF015 This factsheet concerns itself with mains pressure water leaks, arguably the most serious type of water leak that can occur as the leak can only get worse due to water pressure maximising any weak joint or other defect in the pipework. A mains pressure water leak has to arise from a defective in-let pipe usually before it reaches an appliance. This is because most appliances are fitted with fail safe devices (overflows), ie, bath overflow, wash hand basin or kitchen sink overflow, boiler overflow, toilet cistern overflow, cold water storage tank overflow, immersion tank overflow which would direct a water leak outside the building. Questions in diagnosis Q - when did the leak occur? - mains water leaks usually start suddenly, not over a period of time Q - is the leak getting worse? - mains water leaks will only get worse Q - how fast is the leak occurring? - mains water leaks will fill a bucket fast Q - is the water clean? - mains water leaks can only be clean water Q - how long has the leak been going on for? - mains water leaks will not stop as opposed to a leaking washing machine that will stop once water in the drum has emptied, or a leaking shower/bath that will stop once the shower has stopped being used, or a leaking central heating system that will stop once the central heating system has drained Q - have you turned off all appliances & if so can you hear running water near the inlet? - mains water leaks will draw water even if every



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appliance is turned off/shut down Q - have you turned the water to your property off at the stop cock? - stop cocks are usually located in one of the following places:

- In a riser cupboard just outside the flat
  - Under the kitchen sink
  - In a service cupboard on the ground floor of the common parts
  - In a service hatch outside the communal entrance (external mains may either be hand operated taps or need a special water board tap key to turn on and off)
- Considerations as to urgency Mains pressure water leaks will only get worse and should therefore be treated as an emergency. This is because the pressure of water being pumped in the public service system will continue to overstress a weak point. If a mains water leak cannot be resolved then the Fire Brigade should be called. In such instance usually the Fire Brigade will be able to isolate the water supply, but beware they are also for safety reasons likely to shut down electrics to affected areas to avoid any risk of electrocution. If the Fire Brigade believe the problem is the responsibility of the water authority they will have access to emergency contact numbers to assist. Legal Context (Whose Responsibility?) Leaks within a flat, on an internal supply pipe are the leaseholder's responsibility. Leaks after the 1st stop cock into the building but before the water mains reaches any particular flat are the Freeholder's/Management Companies responsibility recoverable via service charge contributions. Generally leaks before the 1st stop cock into the building are the water supplier's responsibility. If the incoming water mains is aged or original enquiries should be made as many water authorities offer a lead mains replacement programme and in some circumstances works may be FREE of charge. Other instances where works may be FREE of charge are where there is no stop cock to turn off the water supply to the building externally, for example when the leak is within the building but the 1st stopcock is well inside the building. Water leaks, leases & insurance claims Insurance policies usually cover the cost of tracing a leak and damage caused by the leak, but it is unusual for the replacement a defective pipe to be covered. Typically there will be a Clause in the Landlords covenants of a lease which puts a duty upon him/her to keep all service supply pipes in serviceable condition, example below: " 'Conduits' includes flues ventilating ducts cisterns tanks radiators water and electricity supply pipes sewers drains tubes meters soil pipes waste water pipes central heating pipes and also wires or cables used for the conveyance of electrical current and television and all valves taps and switches appertaining thereto and includes (unless expressly excluded) any wires cables or apparatus belonging to any public utility supply authorities or any person or corporation supplying television, aerials internal telephone system or door porter system (if any)."

