

Water is an increasingly expensive resource. Do you know exactly how much water your business uses and whether you're using this precious resource wisely?

How to cut your water usage and costs

On average, each person at work uses around 50 litres of water a day. You can cut the amount of water used in your company by following some simple steps:

■ Read your water meter(s) regularly

Most business premises are metered. Monitor your usage by taking regular meter readings. By establishing a benchmark for normal usage (which may vary from day to day), you can soon identify any leakage or wastage and also measure the effect of water efficiency changes you make.

■ Trace and repair leaks promptly

Although they are sometimes difficult to find, leaks in your private supply pipes and inside your premises are wasteful. They could also damage your premises. It's very simple to check if there's a water leak. Take meter readings at night or at weekends when you know water is not being used. If the meter reading changes, you probably have a leak. Some water companies will help you check for and locate leaks, but in most cases it will be more cost-effective to employ a leakage detection contractor.

■ Fit water efficient taps

Standard twist-action taps can be left running by

your staff or visitors, wasting not only water, but also heating. Dripping taps can waste a lot of water over time. Consider fitting self-closing push action taps that shut off automatically after a few seconds.

■ Install water-efficient toilet devices

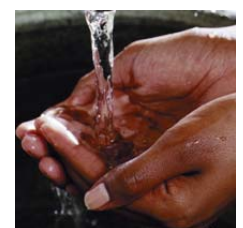
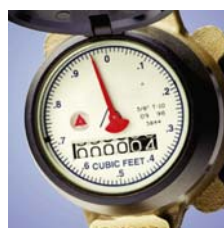
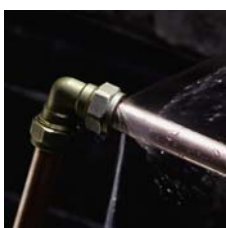
Water displacement devices reduce the amount of water used in flushing toilets. They are simple to fit, often available free from the water company and save you money immediately. You can reduce wastage from continuously flushing urinals by changing the settings or installing a sensor-controlled system.

■ Appoint a 'water champion'

Give a member of staff responsibility for checking the site regularly and making everyone aware of the importance of using water wisely.

The benefits of a water audit

By carrying out a water audit of your premises, you can identify any costly inefficiencies that result in money pouring down the drain. You can start quite simply by looking at water and sewerage bills, checking water usage and the tariff on which your bills are based. You can then review the way your business uses water, identifying equipment or processes that waste water unnecessarily. Ask how, when and why water is used - it may be that nobody has ever thought about it before. Consider replacing or updating any equipment to reduce water usage. Some water companies can help you carry out a water audit and provide useful advice.



Using an alternative water supply

Larger businesses that use water in manufacturing or other processes may be able to reduce costs by using an alternative water supply. For example, if you use a large amount of water simply for cooling or washdown, it may be worth using non-potable water (water not for domestic and food production purposes) from a borehole or by abstraction (collection from surface or ground water sources) from a nearby watercourse (subject to licence by the Environment Agency). Although the initial set-up costs are high, you may wish to consider installing a small on-site water treatment plant to recycle used water, or a rainwater harvesting system. The long-term savings could outweigh the costs.

Getting more advice

Envirowise is a Government-funded programme that offers UK businesses free, independent and confidential advice and support on practical ways to increase profits, minimise waste and reduce environmental impact. Specialist water efficiency advice is available for specific types of business - from small traders to large industrial sites. More information is available at www.envirowise.gov.uk.

What you can do now

- Read your water meter(s) regularly.
- Be aware of any possible leaks.
- Try to be more water-efficient.
- Examine current practices and equipment to identify wastage.
- Consider carrying out a water audit.
- Check whether an alternative water supply is available.
- Consider contacting Envirowise for further information and advice.

You have a right to ask to have a water meter installed and a responsibility to find out how to use water wisely and how a meter may help

There is a range of printed fact sheets available from the Consumer Council for Water or visit www.ccwater.org.uk.