



The Consumer Council

Every Drop Counts

A guide for businesses on saving money and getting the most from your water service



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This publication is available in the following formats on request:

Braille
CD/Audio format
Large Print

1. Introduction

Being more water efficient can:

- Lower your bills and save you money;
- Increase your profits; and
- Help the environment.

The Consumer Council represents consumers on water and sewerage matters. We do this by working with the Northern Ireland Assembly, Northern Ireland Water (NI Water) and the economic and environmental regulators to make sure consumers are at the centre of all decisions and policies.

We work with stakeholders to ensure NI Water focuses on customer service, customer care and delivers value for money in providing its services.

In addition we help individual consumers with complaints about water and sewage issues.

Water costs can be between one and two per cent of a company's turnover. Savings of between 30 and 50 per cent can be achieved by implementing no or low cost water reduction techniques and technologies.

This guide has been produced to help businesses across all sectors find the right information to improve their water efficiency, get the best from their service and save money on their bills. It is principally aimed at businesses that obtain water from NI Water. However businesses can also collect rainwater or abstract water from surface sources like rivers or from groundwater sources (boreholes)* but the same principles, as outlined in this guide, to improve water efficiency can be applied.

*Abstracting or impounding water from surface or groundwater is regulated by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. See: www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/bdotg/action/detail?itemId=1086852799&site=191&type=RESOURCES

2. Quick Water Saving Tips:

- **Monitor your usage:** If you are a metered customer keep a regular log of the water going through your meter. This will help you keep an eye on your usage and help you notice any leaks. We have included a table for recording your usage in section seven. If your business consumes un-metered water supplies of any description then consider installing appropriate meters so you can record and monitor usage.
- **Check your bills:** Make sure you are getting the correct allowances, your usage is correct and contact NI Water with any queries.
- **Regularly check your pipes and fittings:** Check for leaks and ensure your pipes are well insulated against frost. It is worth remembering that any leakage from private pipes will be billed to you or your company.
- **Educate staff:** Speak to staff about implementing water efficiency measures and appoint a member of staff to monitor water usage.
- **Small changes can make a big difference:** Switch off taps and hoses when not in use - a dripping tap can waste up to 30 litres a day.
- **Know where your supply pipes and shut-off valves are:** Shut off water to unused areas of your premises to stop waste from leaks or unmonitored usage.
- **Get further advice:** You can make significant savings in a number of ways, in addition to those in this guide. For detailed advice on water and resource efficiency catered to the needs of businesses contact Invest NI or NIbusinessinfo.co.uk (see section nine).
- **Use water saving devices:** Older toilet cisterns can use as much as nine litres of water per flush. Installing a water displacement device in the cisterns can reduce this by as much as a third. A water displacement device is simply a device that takes up space in your cistern, these include "Hippo bags" or "Save a

Flush bags". Hippo bags are available free of charge from NI Water's education department (see section nine). Please note dual flush, slim line and cisterns using less than six litres of water do not require a device.

- **Rainwater harvesting:** Where possible, use a water butt to harvest rainwater for use in your business (see section six).
- **Consider installing more water efficient equipment:** See our page on Enhanced Capital Allowance (ECA), on how you may be able to get financial help towards this and ideas on what's covered (section five).

3. Getting to grips with your water usage and your water bills

Get an idea of how much water you are using on a daily basis and how that relates to how much you are billed.

Water bills are charged in cubic metres (m^3), a cubic meter is equivalent to **1000** litres of water.

1 m^3 is roughly equal to:

- **15** washes using a washing machine at **65 litres** per wash;
- **30** minutes using a standard hose pipe at **30 litres** per minute;
- **111** to **200** toilet flushes at **5 - 9 litres** per flush; and
- **4444** cups of tea at **225 ml** or **0.225 litres** per cup.

(All figures above are approximate)

Water Balance: measuring how much water your business uses

A water balance is a way of working out how much water is coming in and going out of your business as well as where and how it is used in between. It provides a way of gathering and presenting information about water use that can help you to:

- Understand and manage your water and wastewater more efficiently;
- Work out where you can cut water and water treatment costs; and
- Detect leaks.

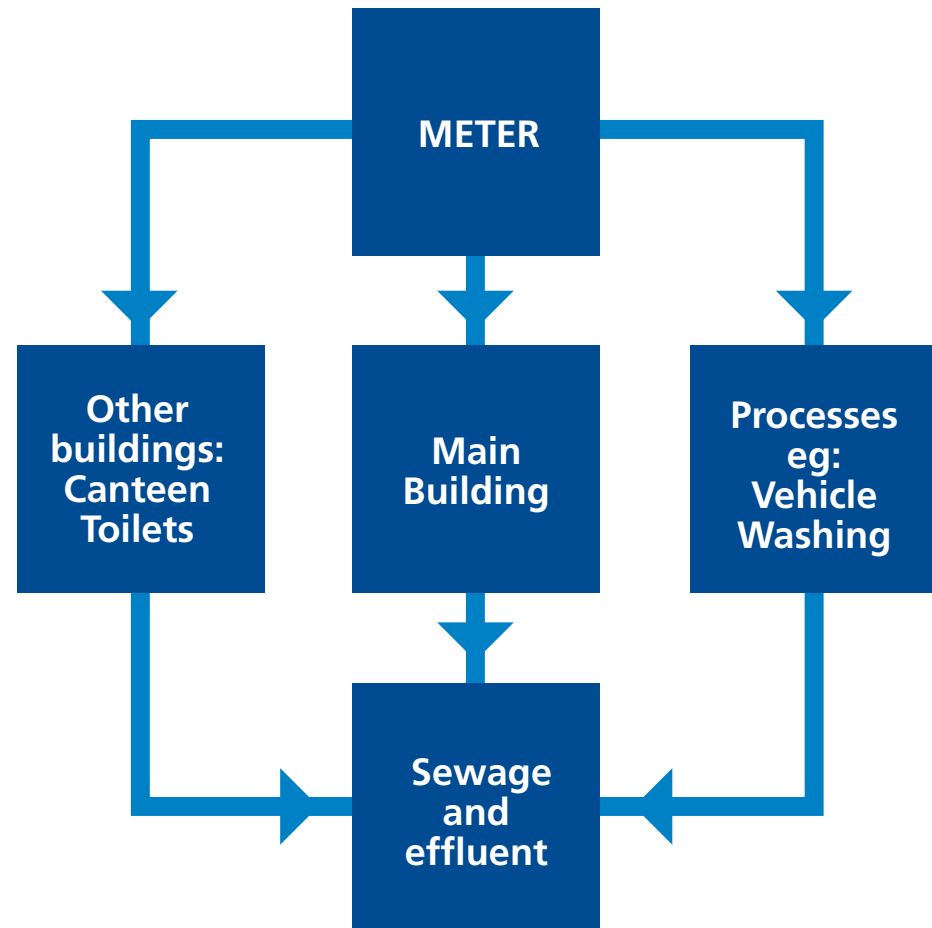
Working out how and where your water is used and where it goes can benefit any business large or small.

Developing a water balance is a simple step-by-step process:

- Draw a diagram of your site, showing the main water inflows and outflows;
- Record your water use;
- Review your water use by reading your meter and the areas where water is used in your business and where it goes;
- Benchmark your usage against other similar businesses; and
- Use the information you have gathered to reduce your usage and your costs.



The size and type of your business will determine how complicated your water balance diagram is. A simple example of a water balance diagram might look like this:



By looking at the different parts of the business and different processes where you use water you will be able to see if there is any way that you can reduce your usage or reduce the amount of water that goes out as sewage. If you can reduce this amount or recycle and reuse drainage water this can reduce your bill and you may also be able to apply for an increased non return to sewage allowance through NI Water (see section four).

If you would like further information on constructing a water balance and benchmarking your water consumption you can contact Invest NI, NIBusinessinfo.co.uk or NI Water. Companies spending more than £30k per annum in total on water, waste, wastewater, materials and energy can obtain free resource audits and if appropriate free technical support to help them identify and implement opportunities to reduce their resource bills including water bills (see section nine for contact details).

4. Is your bill correct?

Check the list below to see if any the following allowances or tariffs apply to your account.

Domestic allowance for metered water customers

Metered customers who pay business rates for their property can apply for reductions on both the water and sewerage portions of their bill. This is 100 m³ per six months for water and 95 m³ per six months for sewerage (the allowance must be used within the billing period and is not carried over). These allowances are subtracted from the usage recorded on the water meter. NI Water will need to see a copy of your business rates bills before applying this. The allowance can be backdated to the date that you started paying rates for your premises, up to a maximum of six years.

Non return to sewer allowance

NI Water automatically applies a five per cent reduction to the measured sewerage charges on your bill. This is because in most businesses, most of the water used is returned to the sewer. If your business returns less than 95 per cent of water to the sewer, you can apply to have your bill reduced accordingly. NI Water charges a fee for this application and may charge for a site visit if required to assess your allowance. All fees are refundable if your application is successful.



Large user tariff

Customers using over 100,000 m³ of water per year and who have implemented a range of water efficient practices can apply for the large user tariff. Once you have successfully applied for this tariff any water you use over this amount will be charged at a reduced rate with reductions of up to 30 per cent for customers using over 500,000 m³. Terms and conditions apply to this tariff; contact NI Water for further information.

Net Annual Value Charges (NAV) and Assessed Charges

Where it is not possible to install a meter at a property NI Water will bill the customer using one of these two methods:

- Customers billed by NAV (Net Annual Value) pay a bill that is based on the rateable value of their premises.
- Assessed charges are a way of estimating water usage for businesses.

Assessed charges have two elements; a standing charge and a variable charge based on the water using appliances at the property. This will apply to both the water and sewerage parts of your bill as appropriate. If you are being billed using NAV you may be able to save money by switching to assessed charges.

If you believe any of these billing measures above may apply to your account or you would like further information contact NI Water.

5. The Enhanced Capital Allowance (ECA)

What is ECA?

The ECA scheme offers a 100 per cent first year allowance for investments in certain water efficient plant and machinery. It means you can write off or deduct 100 per cent of the cost of qualifying plant and machinery against your taxable profits in the first year of purchase.

To qualify, the plant and machinery must be on the **Water Technology List (WTL)** at the time of purchase which is compiled by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

You can check the list on DEFRA's website: http://wtl.defra.gov.uk/product_search_landing.asp?section or by contacting the **WTL** advice line on: **0844 875 5885** or email: wtl@aeat.co.uk

These are some of the kinds of equipment covered:

- Efficient taps - automatic shut-off taps, electronic taps, low-flow screw-down/lever taps and spray taps;
- Efficient toilets - low-flush toilets, retrofit WC flushing devices and urinal controls;
- Sub-metering – to monitor usage for different parts of your premises; and
- Water efficient industrial cleaning equipment - i.e. scrubber/driers (walk behind and ride on machines) and steam cleaners.

How do I claim an ECA?

You can claim ECAs for water efficient equipment in the same way that you claim other types of first year allowances. This is done through your income tax self assessment or your corporation tax self assessment return.

If you need help making your claim for ECAs, contact your tax adviser or call the HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) Self Assessment Helpline on 0845 900 0444.

6. Rainwater Harvesting

Rainwater harvesting systems enable you to collect rainwater for use in your business. This reduces the amount of water you need from the mains water supply. Harvesting can be done on a large scale by connecting harvesting equipment to your existing supply or on a smaller scale using water butts to collect smaller amounts of water for external use.

You can find out your mains water supply costs by checking your water bills carefully. If you want to quantify how much rainwater you can harvest in a year you should use the following equation:

Annual rainwater yield in cubic metres (m³) = P x A x 0.8

P = annual precipitation (in metres)

A = collection area (in square metres)

0.8 = you should expect to collect approximately 80 per cent of this water each year, due to small losses in filtering and small rainfalls that do not generate enough runoff.

You can get the annual precipitation figures from the Met Office website:

www.metoffice.gov.uk

The information for annual precipitation is in millimetres (mm) so you will need to convert these figures into metres (m) by dividing by 1000 (for example the figure for 2010 was 1047.1 mm which equals 1.047 m).



Harvesting considerations

1. Think about the quality of the water you will gain from rainwater harvesting and the quality of water you need to operate your business efficiently. If you need high levels of purity, rainwater may not be suitable.
2. You should consider getting a tank large enough to collect water without it overflowing at the wettest time of year. There are many businesses that can help you develop bespoke rainwater harvesting systems. You can find information on rainwater harvesting on the UK Rainwater Harvesting Association (UKRHA) website (see useful contacts).
3. To comply with water regulations, in most cases before you start work on the installation or make any changes to your water system, you as the owner, occupier or installer must get approval from NI Water by giving advance notice of the work. However, this does not apply to items that are not connected to the water network such as water butts. If you are discharging water to the sewer you will still have to pay a charge to NI Water although this will be at a reduced rate.
4. You may also be able to benefit from tax allowances under the **ECA** scheme. The rainwater harvesting system must be on the Water Technology List before your business can claim the 100 per cent first year capital allowance on its cost.

Work affecting meters

Things to remember about meters:

- They remain the property of NI Water;
- If you need to do any work which may affect the meter at your premises it is important that you contact NI Water before doing this. Not doing so may constitute an offence of tampering with a meter; and
- If in doubt, please contact NI Water.

7. Meter readings

NI Water is required to read your meter once a year and they aim to take readings twice a year. If NI Water is unable to read your meter, your bill will be calculated on an estimate based on previous usage. However, it is always worth monitoring your own usage. You can use a table like the one below. If your meter has not been read, contact NI Water with a reading and this will help make sure your bills are up to date.

A meter will normally be fitted in an underground chamber between your property and the road. Your bill should indicate where you can find this. If you cannot find your meter or there are any issues with your bill contact NI Water. You should also check your meter serial number to ensure it matches the one on your bill.

Meter serial number			
Date	Time	Reading	Running Total

8. Complaints

Consumers sometimes feel that it is not worthwhile complaining. However, complaining can be beneficial to your business, NI Water and other customers. If you have contacted NI Water and remain dissatisfied with the response you receive or the outcome of your complaint, you can contact the Consumer Council.

The Consumer Council has legal powers to investigate complaints on your behalf. We have a dedicated Consumer Support team which assists consumers with their complaints and enquiries in our statutory areas of transport, natural gas, electricity, coal and water. **Our service is free, independent and confidential.**

Tips on effective complaining:

- Give the company an opportunity to put things right;
- Before contacting any organisation, know exactly what you want to say and how you would like your concerns to be addressed;
- Make sure you have the necessary documents to hand, for example bills and letters;
- Always make a copy of any original documents and where possible keep the originals; and
- Have a pen and paper ready to keep a record of the three Ws:
 - Who you have spoken to;
 - When you spoke to them; and
 - What was said.

If you would like more advice visit the Consumer Council website: www.consumerCouncil.org.uk or contact our Consumer Support team on 0800 121 6022.

9. Useful Contacts



The sole provider of water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland Water
PO Box 1026
Belfast
BT1 9DJ

- ☎ **Waterline** (Enquiries and complaints)
0845 744 0088
Customers with hearing difficulties can use 'Text Relay' through Waterline 08457 440088
Leakline: 0800 028 2011
Billing queries: 0845 877 0030
- ☎ **Text phone:** 0800 0515 446
- ✉ **Email:** waterline@niwater.com
- 🌐 **Website:** www.niwater.com

Telephone lines open from 8.00 am to 8.00 pm, Monday to Friday, Saturday from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm and Sunday from 12.00 pm to 6.00 pm

The official online channel for business advice and guidance in Northern Ireland. It contains essential information, support and services for you and your business – whether you work for a large organisation or are on your way to starting up your own business.

nibusinessinfo.co.uk
Bedford Square
Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7ES

- ☎ **Tel:** 0800 181 4422
- ✉ **Email:** info@nibusinessinfo.co.uk
- 🌐 **Website:** www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk

HM Revenue and Customs

HM Revenue & Customs
Self Assessment
PO Box 4000
Cardiff
CF14 8HR

- ☎ **Tel:** 0845 900 0444
If you're calling from abroad: +44 161 931 9070
- 🌐 **Website:** www.hmrc.gov.uk

Opening hours: 8.00 am to 8.00 pm, Monday to Friday 8.00 am to 4.00 pm Saturday

Invest Northern Ireland

Building Locally
Competing Globally

Invest Northern Ireland's role is to grow the local economy by supporting new and existing businesses to compete internationally, and by attracting new investment to Northern Ireland.

Part of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment it provides strong government support for business including specific resource efficiency support across energy, water and waste

Invest NI
Bedford Square
Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7ES

- ✉ **Email:** info@investni.com
- 🌐 **Website:** www.investni.com
- ☎ **Tel:** 0800 181 4422
- ☎ **Textphone:** 028 9069 8585



The UK Rainwater Harvesting Association (UKRHA) is a company limited by guarantee and serves as a focal point for organisations with business interests in the rainwater harvesting industry.

In addition to regulating the activities and standards of its members, it serves as an enquiry centre for the public, industry and governmental bodies. UKRHA provides information to enhance the general understanding of the advantages derived from rainwater harvesting systems.

UK Rainwater Harvesting Association,
Millennium Green Business Centre
1 Rio Drive, Collingham, Newark, Nottinghamshire
NG23 7NB

☎ **Tel:** 0845 026 0240
✉ **Email:** info@ukrha.org
🌐 **Website:** www.ukrha.org



The Consumer Council

The Consumer Council's job is to speak up for consumers and give them a voice. We also ensure that the policy makers in Northern Ireland hear that voice and take it into account when they are making decisions that affect us all.

We do this by running information and education campaigns, influencing the public and private sectors, undertaking research and producing publications. We also help individual consumers with complaints about buses, trains, planes, electricity, gas, coal and water.

The Consumer Council
116 Hollywood Road, Belfast
BT4 1NY

☎ **Tel:** 028 9067 2488 or 0800 121 6022
✉ **Fax:** 028 9065 7701
✉ **E-mail:** info@consumercouncil.org.uk
🌐 **Website:** www.consumercouncil.org.uk

Lines open Monday to Friday 9 am to 5 pm

Notes



The Consumer Council

Elizabeth House
116 Hollywood Road
Belfast
BT4 1NY



Complaints line: 0800 121 6022



Tele/Textphone: 028 9067 2488



Fax: 028 9065 7701



E-mail: info@consumercouncil.org.uk
complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk



Websites: www.consumercouncil.org.uk
www.consumerline.org



Consumer Council Northern Ireland



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