Don't Pay for Dirty Water

Don’t Pay for Dirty Water is a campaign taking action against the obscene scandal of raw sewage dumping in the UK.

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Introduction to the Campaign

The XRUK Dirty Water team and BoycottWaterBills have teamed up to support the UK-wide sewerage (wastewater) bill boycott.

Sign up to get email updates on this and other campaigns run by the XRUK Dirty Water.

Why are we doing this?

Pollution

Raw sewage is being dumped into our seas, lakes and rivers on an industrial scale – almost a million times last year alone [1]. Bathers are getting sick. People are unable to use their favourite natural spots because of the filth. Nature that depends on clean water is being destroyed. Many tourism and water-based businesses are fighting for their lives.

Profit

£85.2 billion! That's how much water companies have paid to shareholders over the last 30 years [2], with another £14.7 billion expected payout in the next 5 years [3]. That's our money. We're paying through the nose – not just for a service we're not getting, but for our health to be threatened and our precious natural environment destroyed.

Enough is enough.

What's The Plan?

Join thousands already taking a stand around the country. Boycott the wastewater (sewage) part of your water bill until the water companies stop poisoning, and start cleaning up, our coasts and waterways.

We will show you how to do this quickly, step by step and with as little risk as possible. Please also read the important information section which contains information about what to expect.

Every 1000 people joining a boycott creates an average loss of almost £1m for their water company in just 10 weeks.

It takes just a few minutes to get started.

Step 1. Don’t Pay

For metered customers

Stop automatically paying your bill.

Visit your bank/online bank and cancel your water company’s direct debit or standing order. Your bills can now be paid individually, for example, set up your own standing order for just the water supplied or pay it monthly, weekly, or intermittently.

For unmetered customers

Your next (or most recent) bill should arrive by post or email with a breakdown of charges for water supply and for wastewater/sewerage charges. If it doesn’t have the breakdown, you may need to contact your water company for an itemised bill. However, as a general rule, the split is roughly 50/50.

You are usually asked to pay in advance for water and sewage services. **Pay ONLY the water supply part of your bill**. You can usually pay in two instalments or monthly instalments but check with your water company, as they differ.

Will it harm my credit score?

Your credit score **can be adversely affected as a result of non-payment of your water bills**. The credit score system is not transparent and we cannot say for certain that companies do not have automatic systems linked to non-payment. This may vary between water companies, and even between customers.

You will though be part of a community of active boycotters learning and supporting each other.

Step 2. Tell Them Why You Won’t Pay

Our three-step complaints process can guide you through a lower-risk process and gives all boycotters a collective basis to resist further consequences and push for more action to clean up our water!

i) File a formal complaint to your water company

Make a formal complaint in writing to your water company, stating that you have stopped paying the sewerage charges on your bill because you dispute it’s accuracy. You can do this by email, by online form, or by post (which slows things down nicely as they will need to reply by post too).

Find out who your supplier is.

Find out how much pollution your supplier has caused.

Use our 'Making a Complaint to your Supplier' template letter to prepare your complaint.

Supplier contacts:

Anglian Water

Dwr Cymru

Hafren Dyfrdwy

Northumbrian Water.

Severn Trent

South West Water. (no online form – email them at customercontact@southwestwater.co.uk)

Southern Water (no online form – use the webchat (“Chat to us”) or write)

Thames Water (no online form – email them at customer.feedback@thameswater.co.uk)

United Utilities (select “Other enquiry”)

Wessex Water (select “Water supply or sewerage” > “Something else”)

Yorkshire Water (no online form – call them or write to them)

You may want to ask them to put your account on hold while you are disputing the accuracy of your bill, and they are dealing with your complaint.

After making the complaint, keep in touch with your supplier. Your supplier should reply to you within 10 working days (otherwise you are eligible for £20 compensation). Contact them periodically to make sure they still have your case defined as a dispute (not a general enquiry) and your complaint and dispute is still active. You may want to continue engaging by post if you started that way.

You are likely to receive a response from your supplier rejecting your complaint or dispute. Ask them to review their decision. That gives them another 10 days to resolve your complaint.

Meanwhile, you should prepare to escalate your complaint...

ii) Escalate your complaint

First, inform your supplier you are taking your complaint to the Consumer Council for Water (CCW)
If your supplier says that your complaint has been resolved, ask them to confirm that it has passed "stage 2" of the complaints process. Ask them for the basis of their decision if they say your complaint has been resolved. If it has, inform your supplier you are taking your complaint to the Consumer Council for Water (CCW). Use our 'Informing your supplier you are escalating to CCW' template. Insist they put a hold on the account while the complaint is being discussed with CCW.

Second, complain to the Consumer Council of Water (CCW)

Fill out the CCW online complaints form, using 'Making a complaint to CCW' template for the "how can we help?" box. If you are not satisfied with the response from the CCW, you can take it to the next stage.

Third, apply for adjudication through the Dispute Resolution for the Water Industry (DRWI)
This is a relatively new service especially for CCW water industry disputes. On this page, you can find customer guidance and the online application form.

Fourth, if you are not satisfied with the CCW or DRWI outcome you can complain to OFWAT

Fill out the OFWAT online form, using 'Making a complaint to OFWAT' template to prepare your complaint.

Their online form will tell you that they do not deal with customer billing matters. They will try to push you back to CCW. Complain to OFWAT using the form anyway – the more people that contact OFWAT, the more they will understand our disgust.

iii) Celebrate and start again!

If you reach the end of the complaints process and your only option is to pay the outstanding balance – or if you feel the need to stop your boycott at any point – it is easy to pay the balance and you can start all over again!

For as long as we are doing it together we are making a big impact!

Campaigners and boycotters have massively shifted the conversation and steered political conversation over the last few years. We need to keep the pressure up.

You can also choose to continue non-payment. At this point, you may receive letters from debt collectors or be threatened with legal action e.g. a request for a County Court Judgement or a hearing through the Small Claims Court. Your protest is legitimate.

It is worth noting that mediation is now mandatory for all civil court claims. This is slowing down the legal process and enabling longer boycotts. The mediation session is a good opportunity to reiterate your points to your water company (through the mediator), and to agree a reasonable re-payment schedule if you have decided to stop witholding payment.

Step 3. Join Your Local Boycott Group

Join the WhatsApp chats for your area to help with information sharing and support.

DP4DW Community Announcement Channel

Chats for each water company local boycott:

Dwr Cymru

Anglian Water

Hafren Dyfrdwy

Northumbrian Water

Severn Trent

South West Water

Southern Water

Thames Water

United Utilities

Wessex Water

Yorkshire Water

Sign up for email updates on this and other campaigns run by the XRUK Dirty Water.

Step 4. Help build the boycott

The more of us who boycott, the more impactful and resilient we become.

i) Share information about this campaign with friends

You could email, whatsapp or use social media to spread the message. Some examples below:

> I just joined people boycotting the wastewater part of our water bills because there were 300,000 untreated sewage discharges into UK waterways in 2022 and shareholders made nearly £1bn in profits over the same period. It’s wrong.

> The more of us who do it, the more likely we’ll see clean rivers and oceans.

> Please join me - it’s easy and quick: https://extinctionrebellion.uk/act-now/campaigns/dont-pay-for-dirty-water/

#DontPay4DirtyWater
#BoycottWaterBills
#ExtinctionRebellion

ii) Rally your neighbours

Hand out flyers to your neighbours and in your local area and put stickers up where people will see them.

- Download templates for stickers, flyers and a letter

Important Information / FAQs

Can they shut off my water?

No. Legally, water companies are not allowed to cut off most domestic households if they don't pay their bills. They may take other action against you, as explained below.

What do I do if my supplier or a debt collector contacts me for payment during the complaints process?

While a complaint is in dispute, no debt collection should happen.

Respond to any outstanding payment requests from your supplier with "my complaint is still in dispute".

If you are contacted by a debt collector, they might flood you with letters, calls, texts, and email – they are trying to intimidate you into giving up. Don't be intimidated! Call them back straight away, as delaying can mean that the flood gets worse. Clearly and politely state the following:

- They shouldn't have this case, it has been incorrectly handed over to them.
- You are disputing the accuracy of your bill and the complaint is currently under investigation by your supplier / CCW / DRWI / OFWAT.
- While the complaint remains unresolved you do not expect to be contacted by a debt collection agency.
- They should refer the case back to the water company.
- If they refuse, state categorically that this guidance is laid down by OFWAT and CCW clearly state that the debt collection agency must refer the case back to the water company.

Can I do this if I'm a tenant?

If you are a tenant please be aware that in some circumstances the owner of the property can be responsible for the bill jointly with the occupier and the company might try to recover the money from the owner. You should check with them first.

What action is the water company legally entitled to take?

According to the Citizens Advice Bureau, your water company may:

- Telephone you to ask for payment.
- Send reminder notices. Final notice gives you seven days to pay (if you have more than one unpaid water bill, you should get separate reminder notices for each bill).

- Pass your debt to a debt recovery agent.
- As a last resort, the company could take you through a Civil Courts claim, e.g. Small Claims Court or County Court to get a country court judgement (CCJ) to recover the money you owe. You have the right to defend their claim against you, and you may choose to engage in the legal proceedings, through mediation and to court, or stop your boycott and start paying at any time during this process.
- Send a notice of enforcement from a firm of bailiffs telling you they have the necessary authority. If they come, they could take goods to sell to pay the money you owe. This is if you continue to withhold AND ignore the legal processes, and once a CCJ has been acquired.

Will it harm my credit score?

Your credit score can be adversely affected as a result of non-payment of your water bills. The credit score system is not transparent and we cannot say for certain that companies do not have automatic systems linked to non-payment. This may vary between water companies, and even between customers.

You will though be part of a community of active boycotters learning and supporting each other.

Template Letters

Making a complaint to your supplier

Use this template to complain to your supplier and to let them know that you are withhold payment for wastewater services

Subject: [Water Company's name] and water services to [your address]

To whom it may concern,

I write regarding [company name] poor performance on sewage treatment as documented in statistics reported by https://top-of-the-poops.org.

In 2025, [company name] had [X amount] of overflow notifications, with additional spillage of [Y amount] already reported in 2026. What is more, legal prosecutions against the company were brought on [insert details of any published incidents if available].

This is unacceptable, given that customers have been expected to bear the cost of necessary investment in infrastructure to improve matters. Bills have increased yet again this year, by a further [X%] in my case, so it is reasonable to ask where this money is going.

(I note from your Annual Report and Accounts that dividends of over [£ amount] were paid to shareholders in 2025, whilst the company's CEO was awarded a salary package of [£ amount]. How can this possibly be justified in the light of ongoing failure within the water industry, which was recently highlighted by Channel 4's 'Dirty Business'?) [Optional paragraph, find the info in your water company's annual report and financial statements]

It would appear that a large portion of customers' money is being used to finance corporate profiteering rather than improvements in infrastructure. Meanwhile, our rivers and seas continue to be contaminated by sewage. This not only destroys precious wildlife, but also presents public health risks, whilst impacting local tourism and leisure activities.

I strongly believe that your failure to provide adequate water services amounts to dereliction of public duty and possibly corporate fraud. For this reason, I intend to withhold payment for wastewater services until I receive evidence to the contrary. I am prepared to pay for provision of drinking water in the interim, since this section of the bill is not currently in dispute.

Please consider this letter as an official complaint. I do not expect to receive reminders to pay, threats of debt referral or warnings of legal action until this matter has been resolved to my satisfaction.

Yours sincerely,

YOUR NAME, CUSTOMER NUMBER AND ADDRESS

Informing your supplier you're escalating to CCW

Use this template to inform your supplier you are escalating your complaint to CCW (after the supplier has resolved the complaint)

To whom it still concerns,

You have informed me that you have resolved my complaint without taking appropriate and proportional action to address the problem that my complaint is based on, namely your company's grievous dereliction of duty, and legal and moral responsibility not to pollute our precious rivers and oceans.

Your response is completely unsatisfactory to me and, as I made clear in our previous communication, I have now been compelled by your inaction to escalate my complaint to the Consumer Council of Water (CCW).

I insist that you put a hold on my account for as long as the complaint is being investigated by the CCW.

Yours sincerely,

YOUR NAME, CUSTOMER NUMBER AND ADDRESS

Making a complaint to CCW

Use this template to fill out the "How can we help?" text on the CCW complaints form – please customise with the date you issued the first complaint to your water supplier.

On XX.XX.XX I filed a complaint with my water supplier.

I informed my water company that I was withholding payment of the sewerage charge portion of my bill since they were not adequately providing this service. By adequately, I mean reliably and safely in a way that does not pollute our water systems causing catastrophic and potentially irreversible environmental degradation and life-threatening illness to bathers.

The company informed me that my complaint was resolved and closed it without taking any action to tackle the cause of my complaint – their inaction to prevent toxic discharges of sewage and chemical pollutants into natural watercourses.

I am extremely dissatisfied with their performance and behaviour in dealing with my complaint while ignoring its substance. I am calling on the CCW to provide a resolution.

Yours sincerely,

Making a complaint to OFWAT

To whom it may concern,
On XX.XX.XX I filed a complaint with my water supplier.

I informed my water company that I was withholding payment of the sewerage charge portion of my bill since they were not adequately providing this service. By adequately, I mean reliably and safely in a way that does not pollute our water systems causing catastrophic and potentially irreversible environmental degradation and life-threatening illness in bathers.

In Ofwat's 's own Water Company Performance Report 2023-2024, it is stated:

"There was an increase in pollution incidents for nine of the 11 companies in 2023 and only one company met the performance commitment level. And so it follows that customer satisfaction has continued to fall and is now at its lowest level since the measure was introduced in 2020-21."

Additionally in February 2025 the Environment Agency stated:

"Work continues on our largest ever criminal investigation, to date, into potential breaches of environmental permit conditions by all water and sewerage companies discharging into English waters."

In the same period, water company shareholders received profit dividends of nearly £1bn. It is completely unfair that consumers like myself should be footing the bill for a service that is not being adequately provided when it is clearly within the means of these companies to clean up their acts.

Fines for one company in this same period were equivalent to 2% of their recorded profits. This makes it financially more profitable to pay fines and continue to pollute than it would be to stop destroying these precious ecosystems. The burden of that falls on you, the regulator,Ofwat .

The company informed me that my complaint was resolved and closed it without taking any action to tackle the cause of my complaint – their inaction to prevent toxic discharges of sewage and chemical pollutants into natural water courses. Therefore, I escalated my complaint to the CCW to provide a resolution. They have also failed.

I now call on Ofwat to do its job and regulate these water companies so that they do not sacrifice nature for profit, safe bathing for shareholder holidays abroad and excessive executive bonuses.

Yours sincerely,