

# Floodcare

Important information and advice for customers  
affected by sewage flooding from public sewers



Dŵr Cymru  
Welsh Water

October 2008  
Ref no: PRE 0051

## Introduction

There are many possible causes of flooding to properties, for example, flooding from the highway, rivers and other watercourses, insufficient land drainage and surcharge from private sewers or drains. Unfortunately there will be occasions when flooding occurs from public sewers.

Most sewage flooding incidents are the result of overloaded sewers following heavy rainfall or blockages caused by misuse of the sewerage system and, occasionally, vandalism.

Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water takes sewage flooding of properties very seriously and we are very aware of the distress and inconvenience such an event causes you and your family, particularly when sewage enters your home.

We have a team of specialist engineers who are continually investigating instances of sewage flooding and carrying out preventative work. If you are unfortunate enough to experience sewage flooding then we will make every effort to help you at this difficult time.

In the five year period 2005-2010 we are investing £51 million to tackle sewage flooding at 1,200 properties which are at risk of sewage flooding, either where it enters their homes or within the boundaries of their properties. This is £15 million more than we invested in the previous five year period. By March 2010 we expect to have resolved all the current frequently occurring sewage flooding problems and to have tackled almost a third of the currently known external flooding problems.

## How we can help

### Step 1 – Call us

It is important that you let us know about every instance of flooding from the public sewers. This helps us to set our priorities and ensure that the risk of flooding is removed as soon as possible. Call us on **0800 085 3968**. The lines are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

### Step 2 – Clean up

When you call us our advisors will tell you when you can expect us to arrive at your property. This will usually be within 3 hours. Priority will be given to customers who have flooding inside their homes. We'll carry out an initial clean up and return later if necessary.

*See page 4*

### Step 3 – Investigation

We'll carry out an initial investigation to establish the cause of the flooding and we'll contact you within 2 working days of the incident to tell you how the investigation will progress. You'll have one point of contact who will be available to answer your questions. In some cases this investigation may be complex and take some time. It may be that the flooding is not our responsibility and other organisations, such as local councils, will need to be involved.

*See page 5*

### Step 4 – Cause

We'll visit you or contact you again within 10 working days to tell you the cause of the flooding or how our investigations are progressing and, if we have established the cause, any remedial work we plan to carry out.

*See page 5*

### Step 5 – Compensation

We will automatically send you any payment you are due to receive as per our guaranteed standard payment scheme within 20 working days, if we know about the incident. We will advise you to claim from your home insurance for any building or contents damage, however, we will contribute £80 towards your premium excess (for each claim made) and a contribution of £40 towards the increase in premium you may be charged when you next renew your policy.

*See page 5*

### Step 6 – Follow up

We'll contact you again within 30 days of the incident to tell you the final results of our investigations and what we've been able to do to prevent further flooding. It may be that further work is needed which will form part of a larger project. In this case we'll keep you updated, every 90 days, regarding the timescale for this project within our future Asset Management Plan.

## Who is responsible for the sewerage system?

The sewerage system is made up of public sewers, private sewers and private drains. Welsh Water is responsible for the public sewerage system. Each customer is connected to a drain; this is the responsibility of the property owner. Customers are responsible for their private drains up to the point where they join the public sewer. Customers served by a private sewer are jointly and equally responsible for its repair and maintenance along with all those served by it. Some properties are not connected to sewers they are served by cesspits and septic tanks.

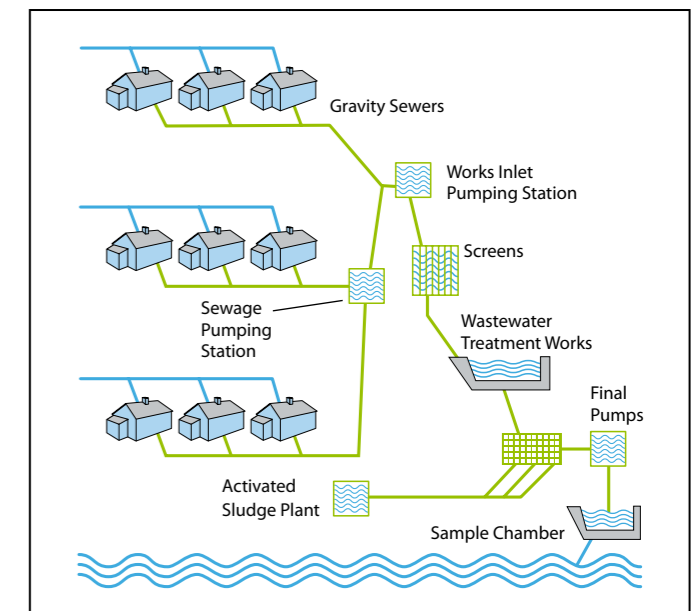
We hold digital maps of all public sewers and you can ask for a copy of the sewer map for your area (there will be a small charge for this). There are instances when it is not clear who is responsible for a sewer pipe and we may need to investigate.

If a problem has been caused by something in a private drain or sewer, you and anyone else who uses it will need to engage the services of a competent contractor to clear the blockage or make a repair. Welsh Water is not responsible for maintaining and repairing private pipes.

## How your sewerage system works...

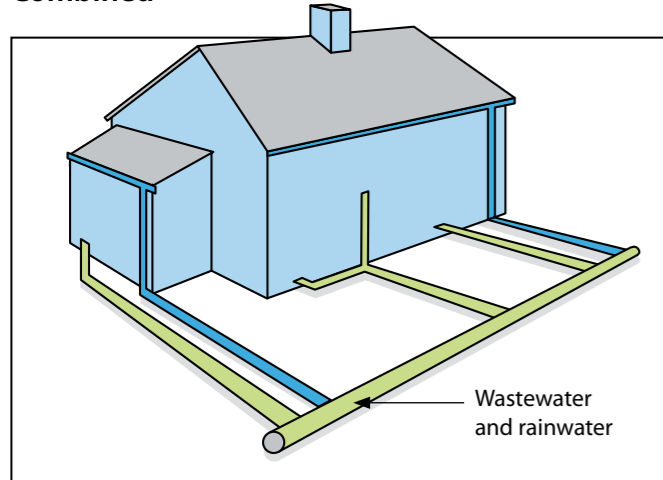
On average each of us generates between 135 litres and 180 litres (30 to 40 gallons) of wastewater each day. During wet weather this sewage contains large amounts of rain water. This dilutes the sewage and helps to flush out the sewers.

Sewers work by using gravity to carry the sewage to a wastewater treatment works. This is easy in hilly areas because we simply follow the line of the hill to provide the gradient. In flat areas the sewers have to be dug deeper to provide the gradient needed to transport the sewage. When gravity can't be used pumps are needed to push the sewage along pipes called rising mains.



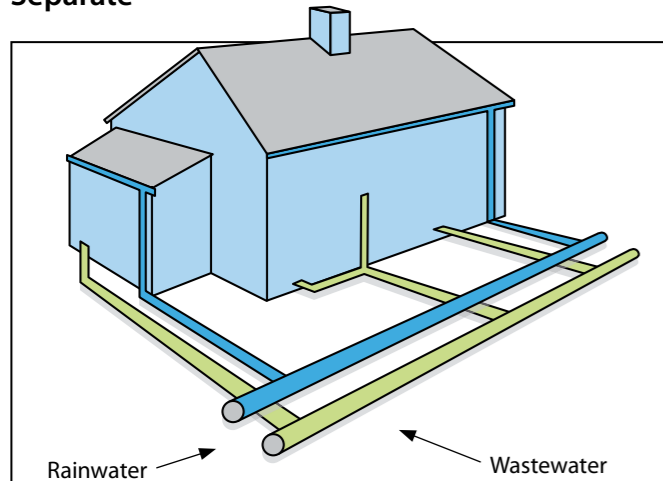
There are two different kinds of sewerage systems – combined and separate.

### Combined



Generally used before 1960. They take both foul sewage (human effluent) and rainwater from homes and other buildings. Whilst foul sewage is fairly constant, rainfall is variable. Combined sewers have to be able to carry a certain amount of rainfall in addition to foul sewage. Sewers are designed to carry a fixed total volume of water. This is calculated by multiplying the 'dry weather flow' (the normal amount of foul sewage generated on a normal day in a dry spell), by three to give the design capacity of the sewer. Sewers range in size from 10 centimetres to several metres in diameter.

### Separate



From approximately 1960 developments were built with separate sewerage systems – one sewer for foul sewage and another bigger one, called a surface water sewer, for rainwater. This is because it is not really necessary to treat rain water and waste water treatment works served by combined sewers have to be bigger to cope with the volume of rain water. The foul sewage flows to a wastewater treatment works to be treated. The surface water flows to a river or stream, thus returning to the environment.

### What is sewer flooding and why does it happen?

When sewage escapes from a pipe, through a manhole, drain or by backing up in the toilet this is known as sewer flooding.

Flooding can be caused by:

- a blockage in the sewer pipe. This may be due to root growth, a collapse or misuse, or vandalism – we have found paint tins, disposable nappies, layers of congealed fat and grease as well as clothes or rags that have caused blockages
- equipment failure, for example the pumps at a pumping station not operating due to electrical or other problems
- hydraulic overload - when the sewer is overloaded either because it is too small to deal with the amount of sewage in it (possibly because of increased development in the area) or during storm conditions when too much rainwater from roads and fields ends up in the sewer.

The cause may be some distance away from where the flooding happens.

There are four classifications of sewer flooding from public sewers:

- **Internal flooding** – when the sewage enters a building.
- **External flooding** – where a customer has been materially affected by the flooding. We consider this to be:
  - access to your home cannot be achieved without stepping through sewage flooding
  - your garden is extensively flooded leading to it's effective destruction and rendering it unavailable for the enjoyment of family and pets
  - outbuildings or garages other than integral are flooded inside
- **Other serious flooding** – major flooding on A roads or flooding of similar significance or disruption.
- **Other flooding** – flooding of roads, external gardens, roads, public spaces and other areas.

### 1. Responding to your call

We will respond to sewage flooding incidents, whether during normal working hours or not. We will attend as quickly as possible and generally within 3 hours of you contacting us day or night. Occasionally however, particularly during severe weather, we may take a little longer but we will keep you informed of our likely time of arrival.

### 2. Clean up

#### Internal Flooding

##### What we will do

When sewage enters your home or integral garage or outbuildings we will help with the removal of carpets, furniture and other damaged items. We'll clean up and, if you agree, disinfect the flooded areas. We will usually do this when we first respond to the incident. In busy periods we may have to complete the clean up work the following day or as soon as we possibly can. We may bring in other specialists to help.

You will need to check with your insurers whether they require you to keep damaged items for examination by the loss adjusters acting for your insurance company. If there is no suitable place to store the items at your home or there is a risk of theft or vandalism we will store damaged items at our nearest depot for you, until your loss adjuster has examined them. When the items are not insured we will dispose of them for you if you wish.

#### Internal Flooding

##### What you should do

- If your gas meter or any gas appliance has been submerged contact your gas supplier before switching on the gas or lighting any appliance
- If your electricity meter, fuse box or any electrical appliance or socket has been submerged contact your electricity supplier for advice before using any electrical equipment
- Record the details of the damage with photographs or video if possible
- The use of a dehumidifier is highly recommended. We will loan you a dehumidifier if we have one available
- Ensure your home or integral garage is well ventilated. Leave windows open as much as possible
- Airbricks to any under floor spaces should be unblocked to ensure a free flow of air.

#### External Flooding

When the cause of the sewage flooding has been removed, all affected areas will be cleared of sewage debris. All waste material will be taken away. With your agreement all flooded areas will be treated with disinfectant.

Where lawns or other garden areas, such as gravel, are affected we will have to return to clean up thoroughly when the ground and any remaining debris have dried out. You will need to restrict use of the affected areas until the clean up is completed and, with your agreement, we will screen off the area, until it recovers.

If the area is very badly contaminated we may replace turf, gravel or other garden surfaces if this is deemed necessary. We will remove and replace plants and shrubs destroyed by the flooding or agree a cash settlement with you if you prefer to re-stock and replace the items yourself.

#### Other Flooding

Where necessary we will arrange for affected areas of public highways to be cleaned.

The Water Research Centre (WRC) offers advice regarding the impact of sewage flooding in gardens and other external areas and how it should be dealt with. The advice they give is summarised below:

#### WRC

The majority of the microbial population from sewage flooding onto playing fields, gardens, lawns, tarmac and other paved areas will be inactivated within days due to exposure to UV radiation – natural sunlight. A disinfectant can be used for tarmac and paved areas if necessary, however, sewage on soil and grassed areas should be left to decay naturally.

In trials conducted by WRC, coliform numbers on turf and clay were reduced to background levels expected as part of the natural environment often within 13 days. However, this was extended to 20 days on soil and sand in the spring and autumn. The table below indicates the relative quarantine periods required for various outdoor surfaces based on the maximum survival times for E coli under seasonal conditions.

Generally, the least absorbent or pervious surfaces absorbed the least sewage, and bacteria concentrations reverted to background levels in the shortest time.

The research also found that there was very little risk to public health from sewage contamination if simple procedures are followed. On external surfaces, any excess water should be removed and the area not used for recreational activities. It is not advisable to 'dig in' any contaminants as UV radiation (natural sunlight) will naturally inactivate any pathogens.

Relative quarantine periods

Season	Ground Surface	
	Turf/Clay	Soil/Sand
Spring	13	20
Summer	6	9
Autumn	13	20
Winter	18	11

### 3. Investigation

Following our initial assistance we will want to establish the cause of the flooding as soon as possible. We will carry out a CCTV survey as soon as we can – usually within 10 working days. This will give us information about the condition of the sewer and identify serious defects, collapses, root growth or other obstructions.

### 4. Cause

We'll contact you and tell you what we've found, what we've done or will be doing, and when we will be doing it. If having carried out the CCTV survey in the immediate vicinity of your property, and we are not able to find an obvious cause of the flooding, we will need to carry out more extensive investigations over a larger area. Should we discover that the cause is the responsibility of a third party we will write to them explaining what we have found and ask them to take action as soon as possible. We will keep you updated throughout the investigation.

If the condition of the sewer is such that a larger scale project is required to fix the problem we will keep you updated on the progress we are making and the likely timescale.

You will be able to contact us at any time by telephoning our 24 hour call centre on **0800 085 3968**, or during office hours, by contacting the person who is dealing with your incident.

### 5. Compensation

**If you have engaged the services of a private contractor to assist you and you have not contacted us about the incident we will not refund the costs you have incurred.**

**If the cause of the flooding is not attributable to the public sewer network, for example, it is an obstruction in your private drain you will not be entitled to a guaranteed standard payment and will not be entitled to any compensation from Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water.**

#### Household Customers

##### Internal flooding

If you called us for help and we attended your property you will receive the guaranteed standard payment within 20 working days of the incident.

We will ask you to contact your home/contents insurers to rectify the damage. This is because they will deal with the matter on your behalf and will usually provide 'new for old' cover.

We appreciate that you will have some uninsured losses therefore we will make a contribution of £80 towards your premium excess (for each claim made), and a contribution of £40 towards the increase in premium you may be charged when you next renew your policy.

Please complete the claim form in this booklet.

For severe cases your insurers may agree to you being accommodated elsewhere, but make sure you agree this with them before moving out.

##### External flooding

If you called us for help and we attended your property you will receive the guaranteed standard payment within 20 working days of the incident.

We will ask you to contact your home/contents insurers. This is because they will deal with the matter on your behalf and will usually provide 'new for old' cover.

We appreciate that you will have some uninsured losses therefore we will make a contribution of £80 towards your premium excess (for each claim made), and a contribution of £40 towards the increase in premium you may be charged when you next renew your policy.

Please complete the claim form in this booklet.

##### **If you do not have home insurance**

If you called us for help and we attended your property you will receive the guaranteed standard payment within 20 working days of the incident.

If you are a household property, you do not have insurance **AND** are facing **FINANCIAL HARDSHIP** as a result of the incident we will consider making a contribution towards the cost of repair or replacement of any damaged items.

Please check with us before you dispose of any damaged items.

When completing the claim form in this booklet you will be asked to provide supporting information and we will not be able to process your claim without it. All claim forms and supporting information must be sent to the address for your area.

#### Non-household (business) Customers

##### Internal flooding

If you called us for help and we attended your property you will receive the guaranteed standard payment within 20 working days of the incident.

We expect non-household customers to have the appropriate insurance in place and you should contact your own insurers to rectify the damage.

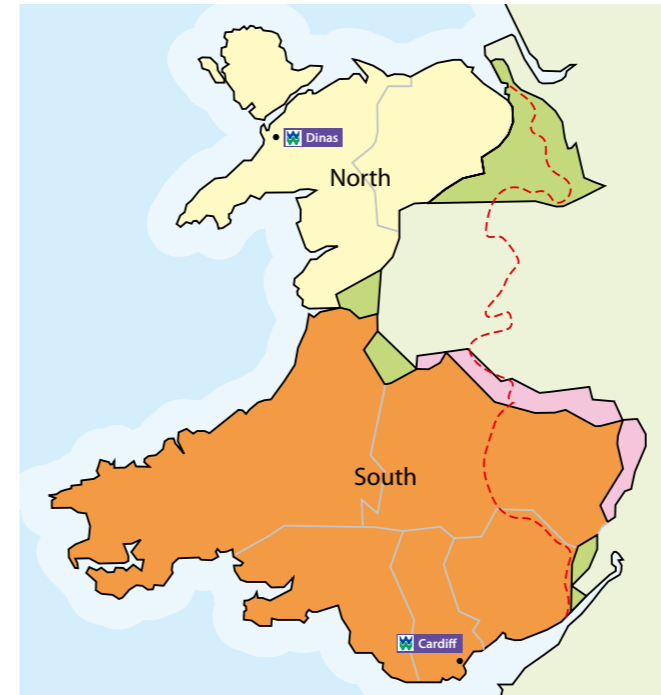
We do not make compensation payments or ex-gratia payments to non-household customers.

##### External flooding

If you called us for help and we attended your property you will receive the guaranteed standard payment within 20 working days of the incident.

We expect non-household customers to have the appropriate insurance in place and you should contact your own insurers to rectify the damage.

We do not make compensation payments or ex-gratia payments to non-household customers.



Send your completed claim form to:

#### North Wales customers – Please Contact:

Sewerage Claims Manager (North)  
Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water  
Dinas Depot  
Llanwnda  
Nr Caernarfon  
LL54 5UD

**OR**

#### South Wales customers – Please Contact:

Sewerage Claims Manager (South)  
Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water  
PO Box 8  
Nelson  
CF46 6YG

#### Useful telephone numbers and websites:

For information on flood prevention and clean up:  
[www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)

Network Development Consultants  
(for copy of sewer maps – there will be a charge)

Tel: **01443 331155**

Fax: **01443 331161**

Email: [NDcenquiries@dwrcymru.com](mailto:NDcenquiries@dwrcymru.com)

#### Where to obtain useful publications:

If you would like a copy of 'Our commitment to you' or 'How we handle your complaints' please contact **0800 052 0138** or visit our website at [www.dwrcymru.com](http://www.dwrcymru.com)

#### Complaints:

The Company has a formal complaints procedure to deal with complaints about any aspect of the services provided. Our preferred method of dealing with a complaint, as this is the quickest way to get a complaint resolved, is by telephone. Customers are advised to call Sewerage Services on **0800 085 3968**.

If a customer wishes to write to us they can contact us by writing to:

Sewerage Customer Service Manager  
Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water  
Wern Fawr Lane  
PO Box 3118  
Cardiff  
CF30 0BY

Or via email - [sewerage@dwrcymru.com](mailto:sewerage@dwrcymru.com)

#### What you can do to help prevent sewer flooding

Sewers are not waste disposal units. They are designed to carry water, liquid, solid bodily waste and toilet paper. Increasing amounts of litter are being flushed down the toilet.

To reduce the risk of sewage flooding incidents caused by blocked drains or sewers we recommend that you do not flush the following items:

- condoms, sanitary towels or cotton buds
- 'disposable' nappies or tights
- unwanted oil, fat or grease
- plastic or insoluble items
- 'disposable' items, or any other products

If you have any doubts about how to dispose of an item then please 'bag it and bin it' or dispose of it at your local recycling and waste disposal centre.

If you are planning to extend your home or build a conservatory you must make sure that you do not build over a sewer and that you connect your drains in a way that does not allow rainwater to flow into drains designed to take waste water only. If you do not follow this advice you may cause flooding.

Similarly waste water must not be connected into a surface water pipe as this will cause pollution, for which you may be prosecuted. Your local Planning Authority will be able to give you advice about building regulations.

## Glossary of terms

**Asset Management Plan** – the programme of work agreed with the Regulator (Ofwat) for a specified 5-year period. The current term, AMP4, runs from April 2005 to March 2010 but we are already planning our programme for AMP5 (2010 - 2015).

**At Risk Register (ARR)** – water companies are required by their regulator (Ofwat), to keep a register of all properties at risk of sewage flooding and to provide a plan to reduce the risk.

**Cesspit/Cesspool** – a tank into which foul sewage drains, usually from a single property. The sewage is stored there until it is collected. The tank should be watertight. They are usually situated within the boundary of a property.

**CCTV survey** – a closed circuit television camera is inserted into the sewer pipe and the pictures are recorded. It is used to identify faults and blockages in the sewerage network.

**Combined sewer** – generally used before 1960. It contains both foul sewage and surface water.

**Combined sewer overflow (CSO)** – a pipe that discharges to a watercourse during times of high flow, usually during severe weather. These are only operated in an emergency and are subject to consent from the Environment Agency.

**Culvert** – a watercourse or a stream that has been piped or covered over. Culverts are not public sewers.

**Drain** – a small internal diameter pipe which conveys foul sewage and/or surface water from a single property.

**Foul sewer** – a pipe that is intended to carry only foul sewage.

**GS payment** – guaranteed standard payment made to customers who have experienced sewage flooding.

**Highway drain** – a pipe owned by the highway authority which conveys surface water from roads and footpaths.

**Hydraulic overload** – the capacity of the sewer is exceeded resulting in flooding.

**Inspection chamber** – usually situated at the boundary of a property. It is a small shallow chamber providing access to a drain or sewer. It is likely to be situated where the pipe changes direction or where two pipes meet. These are required for drains, public and private sewers.

**Manhole** – this is deeper than an inspection chamber to provide access to a sewer. It is usually situated in a highway or public open space but can be within the boundary of a property. These are required for public sewers, private sewers and highway drains.

**Private sewer/Non-adopted sewer** – this is a sewerage system that was not designed or constructed to our satisfaction or was not offered for adoption by the developer and is not part of the public sewerage system. The responsibility for maintenance and repair rests with those it serves.

**Public sewer** – a sewer which has been constructed by the statutory undertaker or has been adopted as a public sewer or was classified as a public sewer prior to 1937.

**Sewage pumping station (SPS)** – used to pump sewage under pressure from one point to another through a rising main (see rising main) when gravity is not used to move sewage along pipes.

**Rising main** – is a sewer pipe through which foul sewage and/or surface water is pumped under pressure (see sewage pumping station).

**Road gulley** – part of the highway drainage system. A small chamber covered by a metal grate, usually situated at the edge of a highway. It is used to drain surface water from the highway.

**Septic tank** – a tank into which foul sewage from one or more properties drains. The sewage is treated by the presence of bacteria in the tank. They usually have an outlet to an effluent drain or soakaway.

**Sewerage statutory undertaker** – Dŵr Cymru is the water company appointed under the Water Industry Act 1991 to be responsible for sewerage.

**Soakaway** – usually an underground pit filled with rubble or a length of porous pipeline surrounded by rubble. It allows surface water to soak into the surrounding ground and is usually situated within the boundary of a property.

**Surface water sewer** – a pipe that is intended to carry only surface water.

**Watercourse** – a naturally occurring flow of water in a defined channel, for example, a river or stream.

## Sewage Flooding Claim Form

### Section 1

Surname: \_\_\_\_\_ Customer Reference Number: \_\_\_\_\_

First Name Mr/Mrs/Ms: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number day/other: \_\_\_\_\_

Date and time of the incident: \_\_\_\_\_

### Section 2

Do you have buildings insurance YES  NO   
(Go to Section 3) (Go to Section 4)

Do you have contents insurance YES  NO   
(Go to Section 3) (Go to Section 4)

If you do not have insurance please explain why: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Section 3

Are you claiming (please tick)

A contribution of £80 towards your premium excess.

A contribution of £40 towards any increase in premium.

(Please enclose a copy of your insurance policy showing the excess you are required to pay).

(Go to section 5)

(form continued over page)

## Section 4

**Only complete this section if you have no insurance and are making an ex-gratia claim**

Details of the damage/loss

(Include a description of the item(s) damaged or lost, date purchased or approximate age and the value)

Description	Age/date purchased	Value

Attach additional sheets if necessary (Go to section 5)

## Section 5

### Customer Declaration

I/we understand that any payment made against this claim by Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water does not imply any legal responsibility for the damage caused to my property and is made in full and final settlement.

**ALL CLAIMS ARE SCREENED USING A FRAUD DATABASE AND FRAUDULENT CLAIMS ARE ALWAYS RIGOROUSLY PURSUED.**

I/We declare that this is a TRUE and COMPLETE statement of my/our claim following flooding at the above property.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**The issue of this form is not an admission of liability by Dŵr Cymru or its agents.**

Send your completed claim form  
for South to:

Sewerage Claims Manager (South)  
Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water,  
PO Box 8  
Nelson  
CF46 6YG

and for North to:

Sewerage Claims Manager (North)  
Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water,  
Dinas Depot,  
Llanwnda,  
Nr Caernarfon  
LL54 5UD