

Householders will no longer be caught out by expensive and surprise bills, to repair broken, blocked or damaged sewers thanks to changes introduced across Wales and England today.

The changes, introduced in Wales by Environment Minister, John Griffiths will see the ownership of private sewers, that run under peoples' property, gardens or in the road, and connect to the public sewer system, move from the homeowner to the relevant water company.



This will move a burden, that has long been viewed as unfair and unreasonable, away from householders and will mean that from 1 October 2011 water companies will pick up the cost of repairing collapsed and blocked drains.

The cost to private sewer owners of these repairs is estimated at £221 million each year. The transfer will give customers peace of mind from the nasty surprise of being charged for repairs to pipes which they did not know they were responsible for.

Environment Minister, John Griffiths said:

“The owners of private sewers and lateral drains – typically householders – are often unaware of their associated responsibilities and liabilities, and there is no doubt that the repair and maintenance of private sewers can be very expensive.

“This transfer of private sewers and lateral drains is all about fairness for the consumer and ensuring that all homes connected to the public sewer system receive the same level of service.
“

It is estimated that the cost to sewerage bill payers over the next three years would be between six to 27 pence a week. The final costs will reflect the situation on the ground and will vary between water companies. The timing of any increases in bills will be driven by when companies apply to Ofwat to increase prices.

Water companies will be contacting all bill payers in their areas over the coming weeks to explain the proposals. Customers should check their company's website for more information. There will be a three month period for customers to alert their water company to any problems or complaints before the transfer goes through on 1 October.

Pamela Taylor, Water UK's Chief Executive, said

“The transfer promises to bring peace of mind to customers across England and Wales. For the water companies, the transfer is a major change as they will be taking on responsibility for many thousands of miles of pipes, some of which may be in poor condition. There could well be a backlog of maintenance, repair and renewal for companies to tackle.”

Tony Smith, Chief Executive of the Consumer Council for Water, said:

“Once the exact cost of the transfer is known, we will work closely with the water regulator, Ofwat, and the water and sewerage companies to ensure costs are spread over an appropriate period of time and challenge costs to minimise the impact on water bills. “

“This will be a very welcome improvement for customers with private sewers when water companies take over these responsibilities in October 2011. Expensive and unexpected bills for maintaining and repairing private sewers will be a thing of the past . ”

The transfer of private sewers will complete a process started in 1936 but never finished. It puts everyone on an even footing and spreads the costs across all sewerage bill payers. It will also ensure a better maintained, less polluting, and more efficient sewerage system well into the future.