



WATER WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?

Allotment sites like any other owners or occupiers of premises with a public water supply, do have a duty to comply with the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999. The objectives of the regulations are to prevent waste, misuse, undue consumption and more importantly, contamination of the public drinking water supply.

These regulations apply to all domestic, commercial and agricultural premises that receive water from the public mains supply. The regulations are also applicable to sites which have a dual water supply i.e., where plumbing systems are connected to both the public mains and also a private source of water in the form of a spring or borehole. If a site is supplied solely from a private supply with no mains connection at all, then the above regulations will not apply, but the Private Water Supply Regulations will have to be taken into account. The Private Supply Regulations will not be covered in this article and if you require further information on these, please contact us for guidance.

WATER FITTINGS INCLUDE:

- All pipes and pipe fittings
- Joints and valves
- Cisterns
- Appliances and equipment which form the supply system in the premises, the supply pipe is included

Although the Water Supply (Water Fitting) Regulations are not retrospective, where there is a significant risk of contamination from a fitting installed prior to the introduction of the current regulations, even if it complied at the time of the installation, the water supplier can, using the Water Industry Acts, insist on improvements or rectification.

CONTAMINATION includes any reduction in aesthetic, chemical or biological quality of the water due to the raising of the temperature or the introduction of polluting substances – whether harmful to health or not.

The Water Industry Act 1991 outlines the responsibilities and penalties that are placed on both the water suppliers and customers. The supplier has to supply water which is wholesome, in other words, of suitable quality for drinking purposes. The duty for enforcing these regulations has been given to the water suppliers by the government. This is the reason the suppliers grant consent for proposed installations and inspect new and existing premises.

The regulations require that water suppliers must be given prior notification of all new installations, certain specified items of equipment and extensions or alterations of plumbing systems in non-domestic and agricultural premises.

Under the legislation, the supplier has ten working days from the receipt of a notification in which to refuse or grant consent, with or without conditions.



The 5 Categories of Contamination Risk

The regulations define five levels of contamination risk, which are called Fluid Categories:

Fluid Category 1

This category is wholesome water supplied by the public water supplier.

Fluid Category 2

This is water which should be category one but for a change in its aesthetic quality. The effects can be in either temperature, taste or odour.

Fluid Category 3

This is water with a slight health hazard due to the concentration of substances of low toxicity. This substance of low toxicity could be a common disinfectant or antifreeze.

Fluid Category 4

This water has a significant health hazard due to a concentration of toxic substances. Examples include chemical, carcinogenic substances, or pesticides or environmental organisms with a potential health significance.

Fluid Category 5

This category is water with a serious health hazard due to the concentration of pathogenic organisms, radioactive or very toxic substances.

EXAMPLES OF CONTAMINATION RISKS ON ALLOTMENTS

- Hosepipes left immersed in troughs, puddles, drains, on the ground near manure.
- Cross connection with other water sources such as rainwater, recycled water or private supplies.
- Incorrectly installed or poorly maintained water fittings which fail to protect against backflow.
- Storage of water in containers with inadequate lids, vents, overflow pipes or screens.
- The use of unsuitable materials in fittings, troughs, resulting in contaminants dissolving into the water.



The Allotment Site as the Customer

The regulations apply to owners or occupiers as (customers) who must ensure that there is no risk of deterioration or contamination in the quality of the water arising from any water fitting for which they are responsible and must take responsibility for installing and maintaining fittings to ensure that mains supplied water is not contaminated, wasted, misused or unduly consumed.

The water fittings used on the premises must be of an appropriate quality and standard and suitable for the circumstances in which they are used. Fittings must be made of corrosion resistant materials that will not contaminate the water supply. To comply with the regulations, the water fittings must be manufactured to meet the relevant European or British Standards and the Water Regulations Advisory Scheme (WRAS) approve the fittings. WRAS produce a Water Fittings and Materials Directory which can be viewed on the website www.wrás.co.uk/ directory.

The regulations do not prohibit the sale of water fittings that do not comply, but, in most cases, it is illegal to install or use them. Both the installer and user will be liable if the fittings do not comply.

Where to seek further advice: your local water supplier will respond positively to enquiries about existing and proposed plumbing installations. The WRAS website contains a great deal of useful information www.wrás.co.uk/.

What are the main causes of contamination?

● Backflow

This can occur when water contaminants flow in the opposite direction to the intended normal direction of flow. One of the most common ways this happens would be where water siphons from a high to a lower level via pipes or fittings; this is normally referred to as 'backsiphonage'. A second way backflow is possible can be where water is forced in the wrong direction by a downstream pressure which is greater than that upstream; this would be classed as backpressure.

The regulations require every water system to have adequate devices to prevent backflow.

A backflow risk assessment is required for:

- Every water fitting
- Every water point of use or
- Appliance that is connected to or receives water from the plumbing system

● Ingress

This may occur when contaminants enter the plumbing system through poorly installed or inadequately maintained fittings. This often happens by permeation, especially of hydrocarbons, such as diesel or pesticides through plastic pipes.

● Leaching

This occurs when contaminants from unsuitable materials dissolve into the water with which they are in contact.

The risk assessment should result in each risk being allocated a fluid category according to the contamination hazard likely to be present. Each risk must be protected by a backflow prevention device, which has a fluid category rating equal to, or greater than the fluid category in the risk assessment. Within the regulations, backflow prevention devices are given a fluid category rating, which indicates the level of protection they provide.

Liz Bunting
Legal and Operations Manager