



Temporary Usage Ban (TUB)

General FAQs Including Non-Household

Summer 2025

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Q&As

General

What is a hosepipe ban?

This is officially known as a Temporary Usage Ban (TUB), a restriction on customers using a hosepipe.

This is introduced to help preserve water and ensure there's enough water to go around.

Is every ESP Water customer affected by this hosepipe ban?

No – not all customers are affected. The ban is being introduced only in specific areas that are currently under the most pressure by water stress due to the ongoing dry weather and high demand. ESP Water customers within the following areas will be impacted by the ban:

- All OX postcodes
- All GL postcodes
- All SN postcodes
- All RG4 postcodes
- All RG8 postcodes
- All RG9 postcodes

How do I know if I'm impacted or not by the hosepipe ban?

If you live in the below areas and are an ESP Water customer, the hosepipe ban applies to you:

- All OX postcodes
- All GL postcodes
- All SN postcodes
- All RG4 postcodes
- All RG8 postcodes
- All RG9 postcodes

Why have you chosen this area?

The extremely dry spring and warm weather we have experienced is particularly affecting the water sources in this area. Water for much of the affected area is supplied by Farmoor Reservoir, which itself is fed by pumping water from the River Thames. The amount of water Thames Water can pump from the River Thames into Farmoor is dependent on the amount flow in the river – it must ensure there is enough flow in remaining in the river to protect the environment and maintain navigation. The dry spring and warm weather we have experienced means that the flow in the river is low and therefore impacting the amount of water Thames Water can pump into Farmoor reservoir.

The current situation at Farmoor

- We have experienced below average rainfall since March, with the driest Spring in over a century. The South East is currently classified by the EA as being in a state of prolonged dry weather.
- Groundwater levels in the Cotswolds Oolites are currently notably low. The Cotswold Oolites are the porous limestone formation/ bedrock that sits beneath a significant area of the Cotswolds. During a prolonged dry period, flow in the River Thames upstream of Farmoor is entirely sourced from this aquifer.

- A reduction in groundwater contribution to the River Thames, in combination with no rainfall, means Thames Water are at high risk of rapidly drawing down its reservoir storage. Should the dry weather extend into the Autumn/Winter groundwater recharge period this would pose a significant challenge.

Protecting the Environment

- The Environment Agency actively manage the river system to balance the needs of the environment, navigation, recreation and water supply.
- Thames Water's abstraction licence includes a condition that reduces their abstraction rate when flows in the river Thames are low to protect the environment and navigation.
- To support Thames Water in achieving its maximum allowable abstraction rate during very low flows, the EA restrict navigation around Farmoor, install summer boards onto weirs, reduce flows through fish passes, and preferentially protect flows in sensitive river habitats over other streams in the area.

Are Thames Water running out of water?

No, however, the current reservoir levels in Farmoor are below average for this time of year at 92%. Reduced flow from groundwater to the River Thames and no forecast rain means that the ability to maintain storage may be difficult. And forecast high temperatures are likely to increase the demand for water in the area. The hot weather also means more water is lost through evaporation from water bodies such as rivers and lakes. Carefully managing the amount of water Thames Water takes from rivers can help protect aquatic animals and invertebrates as well as local wildlife.

Why does this ban affect me as an ESP customer?

ESP Water customers receive their water supply for sites within the Thames Water region through a bulk supply from adjacent Thames Water networks. As a result of Thames Water imposing a ban upon its own customers, ESP Water are obliged by its regulators to support Thames Water reduce its consumption and issue a like for like ban for its own customers within those same regions.

How long will the ban last?

This will depend on the weather – although our customers' help in using water wisely will also be vital. We need prolonged and significant rainfall. We'll be carefully keeping a close eye on our water levels and will let you know when the ban can be lifted.

Do I have an exemption?

There are certain exceptions where you can continue to use hosepipes - you can find the full list in the legal notice, which will be available on our website from 16 July 2025, here www.espug.com/water

Circumstance / Service	TUB (Hosepipe Ban)
Water Dependent	Exempt
Medically dependent showering/bathing	Exempt
Dialysis, feeding pump and automated medication	Exempt
Chronic / Serious Illness	Exempt

Oxygen use	Exempt
Nebuliser and Apnoea monitor	Exempt
Heart, lung and ventilator	Exempt
Oxygen concentrator	Exempt
Stair lift, hoist, electric bed	Exempt
Unable to answer door	Exempt
Physical Impairment	Exempt
Dementia(s)/ Cognitive impairment	Exempt
Blind	Exempt
Restricted hand movement	Exempt
Temporary - post hospital recovery	Exempt

How will ESP Water enforce the ban?

We hope our customers will continue to use water wisely, as they have done already this summer, and we're really grateful for everyone's help.

While we're not asking customers to contact us about how their neighbours are using water, including hose use, we may get in touch with customers who repeatedly don't follow the rules, to make sure they're aware of the restrictions and how to use water responsibly. Please do not call 999 if you see someone using a hosepipe.

Will ESP Water be paying compensation?

Compensation doesn't apply during a hosepipe ban. This only applies when essential household supplies for cooking, washing, drinking and flushing the toilet are interrupted as the result of an Emergency Drought Order – which isn't the case here.

Why is there a temporary water use ban when my bill has increased?

We understand how frustrating it can be to face water use restrictions, especially when bills have gone up. The recent increase in charges is part of a long-term investment by Thames Water to improve its infrastructure, protect water quality, and support environmental sustainability. These upgrades are essential to meet new regulatory standards and ensure reliable service for years to come.

We've experienced an unusually dry and hot Spring – in fact one of the driest in over a century, and June was the warmest on record. As a result, the Environment Agency has officially declared a 'prolonged dry weather' status for the Thames Valley

This dry spell, combined with a surge in water demand due to the hot weather, is putting significant pressure on water supplies. For example, on Monday 30th June, water usage in Swindon and Oxfordshire reached levels not seen since the 2022 drought. To protect essential water supplies and ensure everyone continues to have access to clean water for daily needs, we've had to introduce temporary restrictions, including a hosepipe ban.

Every drop of water we supply comes from the environment, and we're asking for customers' help to use water wisely during this challenging time. Your efforts make a real difference in helping us maintain service for all our customers.

Why are there differences in the restrictions between different water companies?

Water use restrictions may vary between water companies, as each company has to carefully assess its local water resource to determine whether any exceptions can be made. ESP Water customers shall be subject to the same restrictions as imposed by Thames Water to its customers.

Will you be reducing my bill as a result?

No, we will not be reducing customer bills as a result of introducing a hosepipe ban.

Metered customers pay for the water that they use, so as a hosepipe won't have been used during the period of restrictions, no charges will have been applied for a use that has been restricted. As such, no charge reductions would be applicable to metered customers.

This position on charge reductions during a hosepipe ban is consistent with the relevant legislation contained within the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 and section 76(6) of the Water Industry Act 1991.

You have increased my bill and/or direct debit so why can't I use the water when I need it?

The temporary use ban is in place as we have had a very dry and hot Spring and start to our Summer – in fact, the driest Spring for over a century and the warmest June on record. The Environment Agency has declared that the Thames Valley is now officially deemed to have a 'prolonged dry weather' status, and the agency is implementing their 'area drought plan'.

The ongoing dry weather and increased customer demand is impacting water supplies across the Thames Valley and unless the situation changes significantly, we need to put usage restrictions, including a hosepipe ban, in place to ensure taps keep running for customers' essential use.

Every drop of water we use comes from the environment and we're asking our customers to help us by reducing their water use wherever possible. As an example, on Monday 30 June, in the Swindon and the Oxfordshire areas our customer's daily demand for water reached levels not seen since during the 2022 drought.

The increase in bills earlier this year was so Thames Water can invest in its network and infrastructure over the next five years. Despite efforts to avoid price increases, extra funding is now essential to make improvements to its services, maintain high water quality and look after the environment.

This investment into the sector will support environmental benefits, housing development, jobs and economic growth. We also need to meet new requirements set out by our regulators.

Do the restrictions apply to businesses?

Yes, businesses are covered, but most of the restrictions only apply to domestic and non-commercial water use.

Businesses and other non-household users can continue to use a hosepipe in many cases where the water use directly relates to commercial purposes, or for health and safety reasons. However, some of the rules do apply to them too.

For example:

- Not using hoses and sprinklers on gardens and green spaces
- Not using a hosepipe for non-essential needs, like cleaning a path outside your business property (unless it's for health and safety reasons)

More details are given in other parts of these FAQ

We're continuing to ask commercial users to use water wisely by:

- Reducing the total volume of water used wherever possible - for example, through activities such as washing vehicles - particularly in peak periods between 7-9am and 6-8pm

- Checking for leaks on their site - even a small constant dribble can waste around 400 litres per day – as much as a family of 4 uses over the same time
- Stopping urinals from flushing overnight - even if they don't have sensors fitted, turning off the flow to the urinals could save thousands of litres of water
- Reminding staff about the importance of saving water - everyone can do their bit to help

I have a non-mains water source – can I use a hose from that?

Yes – you can still use water that is not sourced from the mains such as grey water, rainwater from a water butt, or water from a private borehole through a hosepipe.

Why is Thames Water's desalination plant broken when we need it in a drought?

The desalination plant doesn't support this region and therefore wouldn't be used in this circumstance,

The Gateway Water Treatment works is not in operation while Thames Water focus on essential operational upgrades that are required in the area.

The Gateway plant is designed to only provide 5 per cent of London's water supplies during very dry conditions, should the need arise.

If the plant was operational this summer, we'd still need a hosepipe ban in this region because of the unprecedented weather.

What is Thames Water doing to tackle leakage?

Thames Water is playing its part to reduce leakage across our network - fixing 650 leaks every week by targeting hot stop areas and rolling out smart meters to help us locate leaks on customers' pipes. They've installed over 1 million smart meters, which are critical in helping it to locate leaks at customers' homes. They continue to roll out smart water meters to households in its area, installing or upgrading a further c.1,200,000 smart meters to homes and businesses by 2030. They've installed almost 40,000 acoustic loggers on our water network to help detect leaks and expect to have 100,000 in place by mid-2027.

Outdoors

What if I have an irrigation system for my garden or allotment?

Yes, this is allowed, as long as you're using an approved drip or trickle irrigation watering system. It must be fitted with a pressure reducing valve and a timer, that are not handheld, that place water drip by drip directly onto the soil surface or beneath the soil surface without any surface run off or dispersion of water through the air using a jet or mist.

I have an allotment; can I still water my crops with a hosepipe?

A hosepipe can be used to water food crops at domestic premises or private allotments, where this cannot be reasonably done by a watering can.

What if I've just laid/sown a lawn or planted things?

You can only use a hose or sprinkler if the laying, sowing or planting was completed by a business as a service – such as a landscaping company. In this case, hose use is allowed for the first 28 days from the day of planting, sowing or turf laying. The hosepipe must only be used on the new planting, and not elsewhere.

After 28 days, you must stop using a hose – you can still use a watering can instead (or an irrigation system)

Can my gardener or landscaper still water my garden?

No, hosepipes can't be used on domestic or non-commercial gardens or plants. The only exemption is for newly laid/sown lawns and new planting, which they can water with a hose for the first 28 days – as mentioned in the last question.

What about ponds, fish pools and fountains?

You can only use a hose for filling or maintaining ponds or pools if you're keeping fish or other aquatic animals in it

- You can only fill or maintain an ornamental fountain if either:
- It is in or near a fishpond and necessary to oxygenate the water to keep the fish healthy or
- Its use has religious significance

I'm building a swimming pool - can I fill it during construction?

Yes, if it's essential to complete the construction, this is allowed. But if you can delay building the pool until we're out of the drought, this would really help.

Just a reminder - once the swimming pool is finished, water use for filling and maintenance is not allowed during the ban.

Can I still clean my boat?

You can't use a hosepipe to clean private leisure boats, except:

- any areas enclosed by walls and a roof
- where fouling is causing increased fuel consumption or where engines are designed to be cleaned with a hosepipe
- to prevent or control the spread of non-native and/or invasive species
- if the vessel is your primary residence; or
- if you are a business where boat cleaning is done as a service to customers

Can I fill the water tank of my motor home with a hosepipe?

Yes, you can use water for activities like drinking/cooking/washing and not for any activity prohibited under the ban.

What does this mean for sports and recreation areas, parks and gardens?

Sports pitches can only water the area actively used for play (not the entire ground) with a hosepipe or sprinkler, and only if needed for health and safety reasons. For example, if the ground is becoming dangerously hard to play on.

In general, hoses and sprinklers can't be used in parks and public gardens and other green spaces. There are details of exemptions for health and safety, and for National Plant Collections, in the full rules.

Health and well being

What if I need to use a hose for health and safety reasons?

We have exceptions for this. Learn more in the legal notice.

I have a pool or hot tub for medical treatment - is this affected?

Don't worry, you can still fill or maintain your pool or hot tub in this case.

Does the ban affect pools used for animal health?

No - pools used to decontaminate animals from infections or disease, or for vet treatment, are exempt.

Businesses

What do you consider to be a business

In these FAQs we use the term business to include any non-household, including public sector organisations and charities.

Do restrictions affect sensitive customers such as hospitals and prisons?

No – hospitals and prisons are exempt from the restrictions. If certain activities, like maintaining public gardens, can be done using alternative methods - such as watering cans or more water-efficient products - then these practices are encouraged and permitted to continue during the temporary restrictions.

Does the ban impact agriculture?

No - there are exemptions for agricultural land, or land used to grow crops, fruit, vegetables or plants as part of a business.

Does the ban impact garden centres and plant nurseries?

No - there are exemptions for plants grown or kept for sale or commercial use. We would, however, encourage the use of a watering can or other water efficient devices such as drip or trickle irrigation systems.

If you have a flowerbed on your premises which isn't for sale, then you cannot use a hosepipe for this.

Please note, filling displayed ornamental fountains with a hosepipe is also prohibited unless this is necessary to supply sufficient oxygen to the water in a pond to keep fish healthy.

What does this mean for parks and gardens?

In general, hoses and sprinklers can't be used in parks and public gardens and other green spaces. There are details of exemptions for health and safety, and for National Plant Collections, in the full rules.

Can I use a hosepipe to water newly planted trees

You are allowed to use a hosepipe to water standard trees (including standard trees with a branchless stem of at least 1.8m high which are planted in urban settings, such as streets), whips, saplings and hedging planted within the last three years of the start of this prohibition, where this cannot be hand watered or watered with non-potable water.

We're a council and need hosepipes or sprinklers to water hanging baskets and floral displays

During the period of the ban, hosepipes and sprinklers cannot be used for watering floral beds or displays or hanging baskets in public locations. We welcome every organisation's support to use water as efficiently as they can, particularly when it comes to carrying out tasks which are part of regular maintenance activities.

I have to maintain planters – can I use a hosepipe for this?

No. You can't use a hosepipe for this; you'd have to use an alternative such as a watering can or products such as drip or trickle irrigation systems.

Does the ban impact professional cleaners, like window cleaners?

No – where this is done by a business as a service to customers, windows, walls, paths, patios and other artificial surfaces (like artificial grass) around homes can be cleaned with a hose or jet washer.

Does the ban impact car washing services?

No - where vehicle cleaning is done as a service to customers by a business, hose or jet washer use is allowed.

Can I wash the vehicles I use for my business using a hosepipe?

'Public service vehicles' (as defined in section 1 of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981) and 'Goods Vehicles' (as defined in section 192 of the Road Traffic Act 1988) can be cleaned using a hosepipe under the rules. All other vehicles used by businesses are covered by the ban and a hosepipe can't be used to wash them.

We encourage businesses to reduce or delay cleaning their vehicles during the drought, unless it's needed for health and safety reasons.

I own a taxi/private hire vehicle, can I use a hosepipe to keep this clean?

You wouldn't be able to use your hosepipe for this; you'd need to find an alternative way to keep the vehicle clean such as using a bucket and sponge.

I run a wedding car/ limousine business and need to keep these clean for someone's big day. Can I use a hosepipe to do this?

You wouldn't be able to use your hosepipe for this; you'd need to find an alternative way to keep the cars clean such as using a bucket and sponge.

What if I use a customer's hosepipe for my business, i.e. to clean wheelie bins, water a customer's flowers or valet their car?

You can use customers' hosepipes and sprinklers where it is directly related to your day-to-day business excluding the watering of domestic gardens. We would however encourage the use of low water usage technology, such as a low water use pressure washer wherever possible.

I'm a gardener / landscaper, can I still water my customers' gardens?

Hosepipes can't be used on domestic or non-commercial gardens or plants. The only exemption is for newly laid/sown lawns and new planting, which they can water with a hose for the first 28 days. You can continue to water plants in other ways such as by using a watering can.

We have an ornamental fountain/water feature which we operate in public parks and town centres. Are these exempt?

You cannot fill or maintain an ornamental fountain/water feature with a hosepipe while the temporary usage restrictions are in place, unless this is necessary to supply sufficient oxygen to the water in a pond to keep fish healthy.

Will this shut down public swimming pools?

No – they're not impacted by the ban.

We operate a pool for religious ceremonies; can I still fill this?

Yes, a hosepipe can be used for pools within places of worship or community pools that are used as part of a religious ceremony

Are golf clubs or sports grounds, etc. affected by the temporary usage restrictions?

Sports pitches can only water the area actively used for play (not the entire ground) with a hosepipe or sprinkler, and only if needed for health and safety reasons. For example, if the ground is becoming dangerously hard to play on.

[Will this have any impact my water bill? \[business customers\]](#)

You need to contact your retailer to discuss any implications the ban may have on your bill. Since April 2017 all business customers in England are served by licensed retail providers. You will be able to find details of who your retailer is on your water or sewerage bill.