

colour, taste and odour explained

Scottish Water provides high quality, safe drinking water direct to your tap 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The water that we supply is required to meet the standards as laid down under the Water Supply (Water Quality) (Scotland) Regulations 2001.

Aesthetic components of drinking water quality include: taste and odour, turbidity, appearance, colour, mineralization, and staining.

Sometimes you may notice that your tap water is discoloured, contains visible particles, tastes slightly different, or even has a faint odour. These differences can originate in the raw water source, within the treatment chain in a water treatment works, in the distribution, or even in your household plumbing system.

If you notice any unusual taste and odour, please contact us so that we can carry out the necessary investigations to resolve this matter for you as soon as possible.

This factsheet provides you with information on:

- where we sample
- why your water may be coloured
- causes of discoloured water
- why your water may sometimes taste or smell different
- how to contact us

where we sample

Water is sampled regularly at our treatment works, service reservoirs and at our customers' taps to monitor the quality of the drinking water. In addition to this, some water quality parameters are continuously monitored at major treatment works. Across Scotland over 350,000 laboratory tests are carried out on water samples each year for regulatory purposes. Many more samples are taken by staff for operational reasons (e.g. bursts, new mains, complaints). The percentage of all regulatory samples complying with the relevant standards in Scotland is over 99%.

why your water may be coloured

The raw water drawn from surface sources in Scotland is mostly coloured. The intensity of the colour can vary depending upon the season and level of rainfall. All our water is treated at our treatment works, where every effort is made to reduce this colour caused by the dissolved organic matter. Some of the treatment processes used, like slow sand filters, are not as efficient as others at reducing colour in the water. At some sites, the quality of raw water is excellent and only simple disinfection is then used to treat the water. Occasionally you may notice more colour in your water due to heavy rain in your local area. This colour could range from yellow to brown.

For more information on our treatment processes please see Scottish Water **Factsheet 3 water treatment explained.**

causes of discoloured water

If your water is not normally coloured or you notice some increase in colour, there could be a number of reasons for this change. Some of these are noted below for your information:

iron and manganese

Occasionally, in northern and western parts of Scotland, a reddish-brown colour in the water is apparent and is due to high concentrations of iron and manganese. The acidic upland surface waters tend to dissolve these metals from soils and rocks in the local area. The level of iron and manganese can vary from season to season. The regulation level is set at 200 micrograms per litre for iron and 50 micrograms per litre for manganese. The permissible level is known as the Prescribed Concentration or Value (PCV).

Your tap water can also pick up iron from the inside of old cast iron mains or from your household plumbing system. As part of our commitment to improving your water, we are continually working to replace or refurbish our pipes depending upon their age and condition. As a home or property owner you're responsible for all the water pipers and facilities inside your house and all the underground pipes within the boundary of your property.

In the spring and summer months, in certain areas in Scotland, manganese may show up in your water as tiny brownish looking flakes or particles.

If you have problems with water discolouration caused by iron or manganese please call our **Customer Helpline** on **0845 601 8855** and we will be happy to investigate it for you.

For more information please see Scottish Water **Factsheet 2 – water quality standards explained.**

white water

Some customers may experience what we call 'white water'. This happens when air gets into your household system and dissolves under pressure. When the pressure drops as you turn on the tap, air forms tiny bubbles. These bubbles will slowly float to the surface and the water will clear. If you pour a glass of water you will see it clear from the bottom upwards.

Your water is still safe to drink, however, if the problem persists, please contact our **Customer Helpline** on **0845 601 8855** and we will investigate this further for you.

blue water

Your water may sometimes appear to have a slight blue colour if it is viewed against a white background e.g. in a white bath. This may be because your water is from a high quality treatment works or is from a high quality spring or borehole with very little or no organic content (the same effect can be seen in glaciers, where these can appear blue and white). This is normal, and is typical of water free from natural colour.

work being carried out in your area

If the water from your cold kitchen tap (or any other mains fed tap) suddenly becomes discoloured, this could be because some maintenance or repair work is being carried out on our network in your area. If we have not informed you of any work being carried out, please contact us for more details. If we are not working in your area, we will investigate the cause of discoloration for you and let you know.

change in flow

Your water may also be discoloured if there has been a reversal of flow, for example, water redirected from a neighbouring area. There could also be a sudden increase or decrease in your flow, for example, if the Fire Service needs water to put out a fire, or a pipe has burst. This change in flow could lead to some scouring effect within the mains which can increase both the colour and particles. This is normally only temporary and will disappear after a short interval. To clear, run your kitchen tap for a few minutes. If problem persists for more than 1 hour contact our **Customer Helpline** on **0845 601 8855**.

storage problems

If you notice discoloured water or odour from any of your taps that are not served directly from the public water main, you may have a problem with a storage tank within your property. If you are in any doubt, please call a local plumber.

You should make sure that your storage tank in your house has a close-fitting lid and it is cleaned on regular basis.

washing

If your washing has been discoloured because of the water, repeat the wash without adding fabric softener. If it is still discoloured then please get in touch with us and we will arrange to visit you.

why your water may sometimes taste or smell different

You may not notice, but every water supply has its own distinct taste due to its composition. This is why you may notice a difference when you travel to a different part of the country. Taste differences in water derive from salts and the presence of specific metals such as iron, copper, manganese and zinc present in the water. Some people are more sensitive to tastes and odours than others.

a chlorine smell

This comes from small amounts of chlorine that remain in your supply and is commonly called chlorine residual. For more information on why we add chlorine to your water, please see Scottish Water **Factsheet 5 chlorine explained**.

a metallic taste

You may sometimes experience a metallic taste if your water has picked up traces of substances like copper or iron. This is more noticeable in large buildings with long lengths of pipe work.

earthy/musty smell

Some customers describe this as smelling stale or pond like. It can have several sources:

- By products of algae or harmless micro-organisms in the raw water sources. In areas where we know this is a problem, we treat the water with activated carbon or ozone.
- Long lengths of pipe work within large buildings.

how to contact us

Details of water quality testing in your area can be obtained by contacting us and asking to speak to one of our specialists in the Public Health team.

If you require more information on our services, please contact us:

By phone on our **Customer Helpline 0845 601 8855**

On the web at **www.scottishwater.co.uk**

Or in writing at **Scottish Water, PO Box 8855, Edinburgh, EH10 6YQ**

Alternative formats of this leaflet can be made available free of charge. Textphone users please call **0845 603 8855**. For information on Braille, large print, audio tapes and a variety of languages, please call **0845 606 8855**.

Please quote this reference code when contacting us: **SWFact CTO2 08/08**

We record all calls for quality and training purposes.