

## Bills - Water



Although United Utilities has agreed that they will not disconnect domestic users, it is advisable to treat an amount owing as an essential expense because they can take steps to recover the money through the courts if you have not made an arrangement to pay.

It is worthwhile checking the following details:

### **Do you owe the money?**

- Is the bill in your name? - If not you may not be liable to pay it. Do not sign anything until you have checked this. You should not have to agree to take over the debt to keep the supply connected.
- If you have a water meter, check whether the meter reading was actual or estimated. An estimated bill could mean that you do not owe as much as you think.

### **High Bills - Metered Water Only**

- If you think your bills are too high it is possible that you have a leak or that your meter is faulty. You can check this by turning off your water supply and taking a meter reading. Leave the water turned off for half an hour; then take another meter reading. If the reading has altered you should contact United Utilities or a reputable plumber. If you have a leak you are liable to pay for the water used. If United Utilities discover that your meter is faulty they will replace it free of charge.
- If you have a burst you should contact a reputable plumber straight away. Once the burst has been repaired you should contact United Utilities and request a "Burst Claim Form". This should be completed and returned to United Utilities together with your bill from the plumber. United Utilities will give you an allowance back in these circumstances.

*N.B. They will only pay one allowance per household so it may not be worth putting in a claim for a small amount. It is your responsibility to maintain your pipes.*

### **Arrangements to pay**

- United Utilities will usually agree to an arrangement allowing you to pay for your water weekly/fortnightly or monthly. The amount agreed should cover your current usage plus a reasonable amount off any arrears. This amount should be at a rate you can afford.
- If you are in receipt of Income Support, or Income Based Job Seekers' Allowance United Utilities can ask the Benefits Agency to send payments directly to them out of your benefit. This amount would include your current weekly usage plus £3.30 (as at April 2010) per week off the arrears.
- If you are having difficulty paying your bills United Utilities should bear in mind your circumstances, if you tell them, and where possible amend your repayments to take your ability to pay into account.

See the example letters at the end of the fact sheet

## Debt Collection Agencies

- United Utilities may decide to send your account to a debt collection agency if you haven't been paying. These agencies often collect on a door-to-door basis. If this happens do not panic; simply try to make an arrangement with the agency to pay at a rate you can afford. These agencies can accept low payments, often as low as £3 or £4 per week. If you have difficulties making arrangements with a debt collection agency - get advice.

## Legal Action

- If you receive a County Court Claim for water charges you should fill out the reply form and return it to United Utilities as soon as possible. When filling out the reply you should only offer what you can afford – perhaps £1 per month if you get Income Support, or Income Based Job Seekers' Allowance or have a low income.
- If you already have a County Court Judgement Order for water charges you can ask the County Court to reduce the monthly payment. Again £1 per month should be acceptable if you get Income Support, or Income Based Job Seekers' Allowance or have a low income.

## Disconnection

- United Utilities should not disconnect you if you are a domestic user.
- If you have not informed them that you live there, they may write to the occupier, stating that they believe the property is empty and therefore intend to disconnect the supply. You will need to contact them immediately to inform them that the property is occupied and should not be disconnected.

## Further Advice

The following telephone numbers are a list of useful contacts if you are having problems:

### Billing enquiries

#### Domestic customer with a water meter

Telephone: 0845 746 2222  
Textphone: 0808 143 1195

#### Domestic customer without a water meter

Telephone: 0845 746 1100  
Textphone: 0808 143 1195

<http://www.unitedutilities.com/payyourbill.aspx>

### United Utilities Trust Fund

If you think you may qualify and want to be considered for a grant then you can contact the Trust Fund direct on 0845 1791791 or at [www.UUTF.org.uk](http://www.UUTF.org.uk).

Your Name  
Your Address

United Utilities  
P.O. Box 459  
Warrington  
WA5 3QU

Date

Water Charges – Arrangement To Pay

Account Number: \_\_\_\_\_

*Dear Sir or Madam,*

Due to my financial difficulties I have been unable to pay the original instalment terms in respect of my water charges for the above property.

I understand that the amount I owe is £\_\_\_\_\_

I enclose a financial statement, which shows the extent of my difficulties.

I am able to afford to pay £\_\_\_\_\_per week/month until such a time as my situation improves.

If this proposal is acceptable please send me a payment card.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter, I trust I will hear from you shortly.

Yours faithfully

Your Signature