



Repeat Sewer Flooding Valuation

March 2022

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Background and approach

Research objectives and approach

Sewers can overflow due to factors such as severe rainfall and sewer misuse like flushing non-flushables, which occasionally can lead to incidents of sewer flooding.

Some areas can also suffer the distress of experiencing repeated incidents, and while previous research examined the value or importance that customers place on preventing repeat vs one-off incidents, there was a need to understand how this varies by the flooding consequence and the cause of the flooding.

The research sought to help United Utilities understand:

1. How customers value the prevention of different consequences of sewer flooding
2. How customers' valuation differs when considering the prevention of single incidents compared with repeated incidents
3. Whether the valuation changes depending on the cause of the flooding – heavy rainfall vs sewer misuse
4. Whether the valuation changes depending on the type of flooding – rainwater vs foul water
5. Whether there is support for charging and even prosecuting repeat sewer misusers

This research will ultimately aim to provide you with guidance to help with planning for AMP8 and with evidence to share with Ofwat in their decision on a common performance measure for sewer flooding.

What we did:



An online quantitative survey with 4,494 customers, including a conjoint exercise



Fieldwork took place between 28th January to 17th February 2022



A combination of sample sources were utilised:

- **Nat Rep sample from an external access panel**
- **The WaterTalk panel**
- **UU CRM data of customers who have reported sewer flooding:**

We combined multiple sources to ensure a robust and representative sample of 4,494 respondents

UU CRM sample

1,757 customers who have previously reported sewer flooding at or near their home

External access panel

Nat Rep sample of **1,979** North West residents
Boost of **128** Future Bill Payers

WaterTalk

630 responses from the community panel

Across the overall sample, we had 47% of respondents saying they had **ever experienced sewer flooding at or near their home**, and the other 53% **had never been affected**.

However, in order to make the sample more representative of the 'true' proportion of the customer base that have experienced sewer flooding, the data has been weighted accordingly so that 24% of the weighted data have experienced sewer flooding and 76% haven't. **Weighted data is presented throughout this report.**

When comparing the unweighted and the weighted data, we found that there was actually very little difference in customers' priorities when it comes to preventing the impact / frequency / cause / type of sewer flooding. This gives us **reassurance that the data gives us a good reflection across the customer base.**

Sample profile – unweighted

Subgroup	Count	%
Gender		
Male	2276	51%
Female	2198	49%
Age		
18-29	433	10%
30-39	389	9%
40-49	547	12%
50-59	791	18%
60-69	1114	25%
70+	1139	25%
Region		
Cheshire	746	17%
Cumbria	271	6%
Greater Manchester	1723	38%
Lancashire	1018	23%
Merseyside	734	16%
Sample Type		
UU CRM	1757	39%
External	2107	47%
Internal	630	14%

Subgroup	Count	%
Vulnerability		
Vulnerable	2330	52%
Not vulnerable	2164	48%
Disabled		
Yes	1037	23%
No	3457	77%
Property ownership		
Homeowners	3561	79%
Tenants	873	19%
Bill payer status		
Current bill payers	4295	96%
Non-bill payers	68	2%
Future bill payers	128	3%
Experienced sewer flooding		
Multiple times	1448	32%
Once	648	14%
Never	2398	53%
Household income		
<£20,000	972	21%
£20,000 - £59,999	2013	45%
£60,000+	602	13%
Don't know / prefer not to say	907	20%

Subgroup	Count	%
Pets ownership		
Pet owners	2118	47%
Non owners	2376	53%
Water meter		
Metered	2371	53%
Unmetered	2042	45%
Flushing behaviour		
Flusher	2182	49%
Non-flushers	2312	51%
Location type		
Urban	1417	32%
Suburban	2351	52%
Rural	552	12%
Coastal	403	9%
Near other bodies of water	322	7%
Children in household		
Any children	913	20%
Young children (under 10 years old)	522	12%
Older children (10-17 years old)	542	12%
No children	3581	80%

Executive summary

Executive Summary

When considering various attributes of sewer flooding, the impact is the key factor that influences customers' priorities and what they want United Utilities to focus on preventing

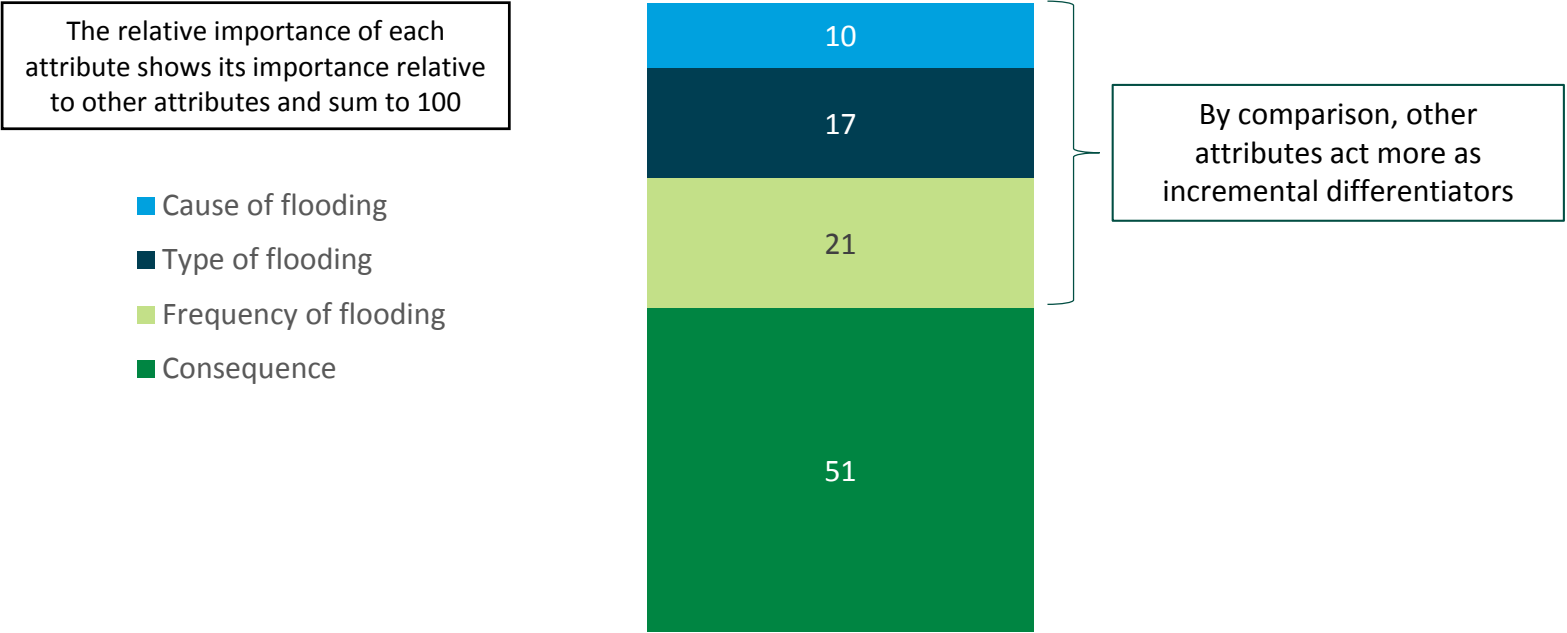
- **Impact of flooding:** Customers feel it's most important to prevent flooding that leads to a hospital or care home closing. The recency of the pandemic may be top-of-mind for customers still and the impact this flooding would have on vulnerable people.
- **One-off vs repeat flooding:** It's key to prevent flooding that happens once every 3 years – this is felt to be over 3 times more important to prevent than a one-off incident. Conversely, one-offs or flooding every decade are comparatively more acceptable and seen as equally as important to prevent.
- **Cause of flooding:** Preventing flooding caused by blockages is felt to be around twice as important compared to preventing incidents due to severe weather or unspecified causes.
- **Type of flooding:** Perhaps unsurprisingly, customers place more value on preventing foul water flooding – it is thought to be 3 times more important to prevent than rainwater flooding.

There are high levels of support for both re-charging and taking legal action against repeat sewer misusers

- Three-quarters of customers say they would support either charging customers who cause blockages to recover the costs of flushing non-flushables or taking legal action against repeat offenders.

The consequence of sewer flooding is the key influence on customers when choosing the most important scenarios for UU to prevent

Relative importance of sewer flooding attributes



Sewer flooding experience and disposal behaviour

Customers attribute the cause of sewer flooding to a wide variety of factors



Limited capacity of sewer pipes

“

*Sewer pipe is old and is combined with **rainwater drainage**. The capacity of the system cannot cope with **heavy rainfall** resulting in raw sewage backing up and onto my property.*

Male, 40-49



Drains blocked by non-flushable items

“

*By litter clogging up the pipes over time. People put things down their shower drains / toilets that they shouldn't such as **baby wipes down the toilet**.*

Male, 18-29



Increasing pressure from growing population

“

*We have a sewer system installed about **100 years ago** and over time with more and more building development for housing the sewers have not been expanded to cope with the **increased demand** (...).*

Male, 60-69



Naturally occurring pipe damages

“

*The pipe is damaged due to **age/tree roots** which causes the backup, this in turn affects a few neighbours' drains.*

Female, 50-59



Old sewer systems in need of maintenance

“

*Poor quality of the pipes, they're considerably **aged** and **haven't really been replaced**. There are many collapses which result in poor drainage and subsequent flooding.*

Female, 40-49



Sewer pipe systems overwhelmed

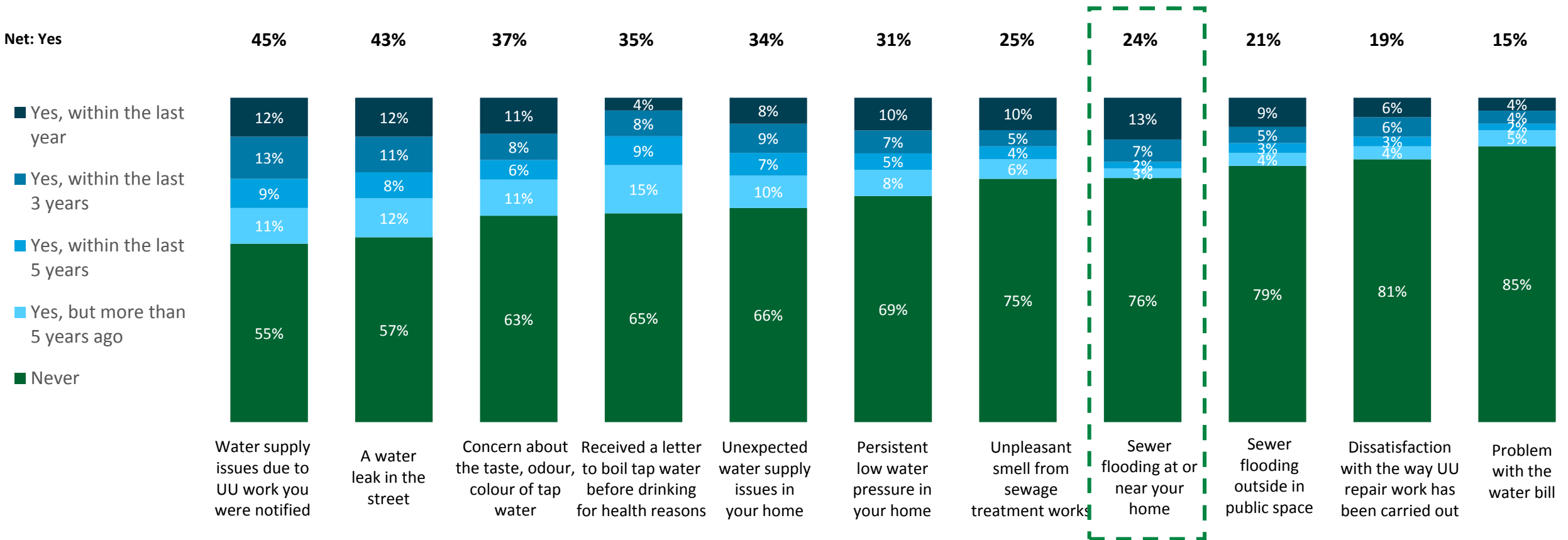
“

*Too much **rain water** causing the sewer to be overwhelmed it can't take it. **Blocked sewer** caused by **nappies** being flushed down the toilet. Takeaway restaurants **flushing oil / fat down the drain** over time.*

Male, 50-59

Although sewer flooding is less commonly experienced than other issues, it has still affected a quarter of customers

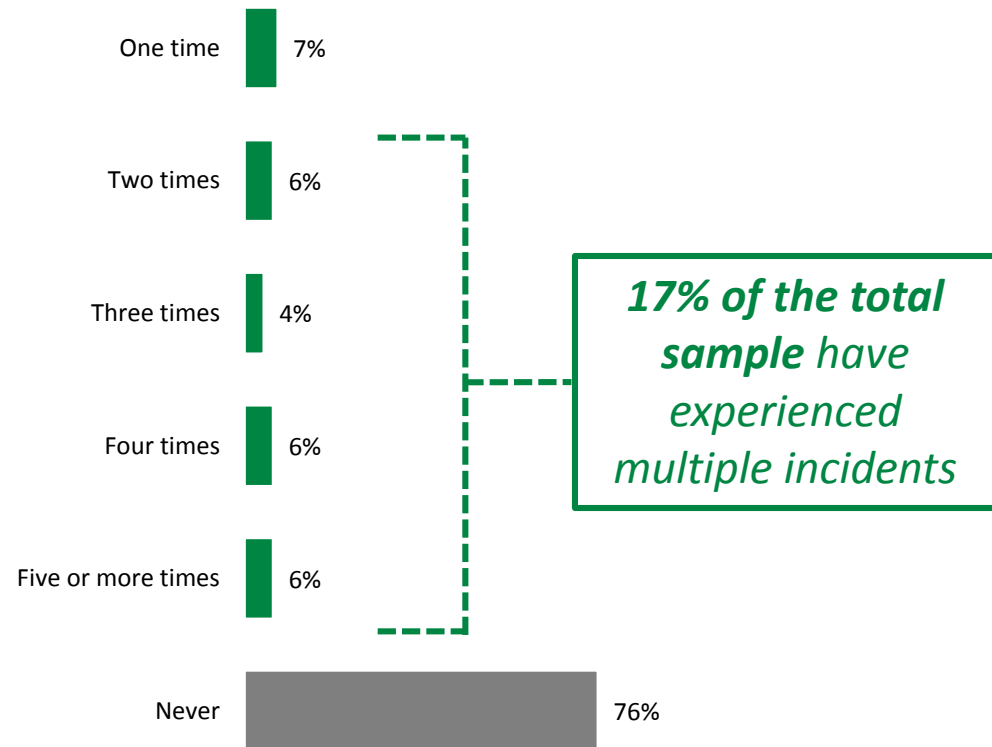
**Issues experienced with United Utilities services:
All respondents**



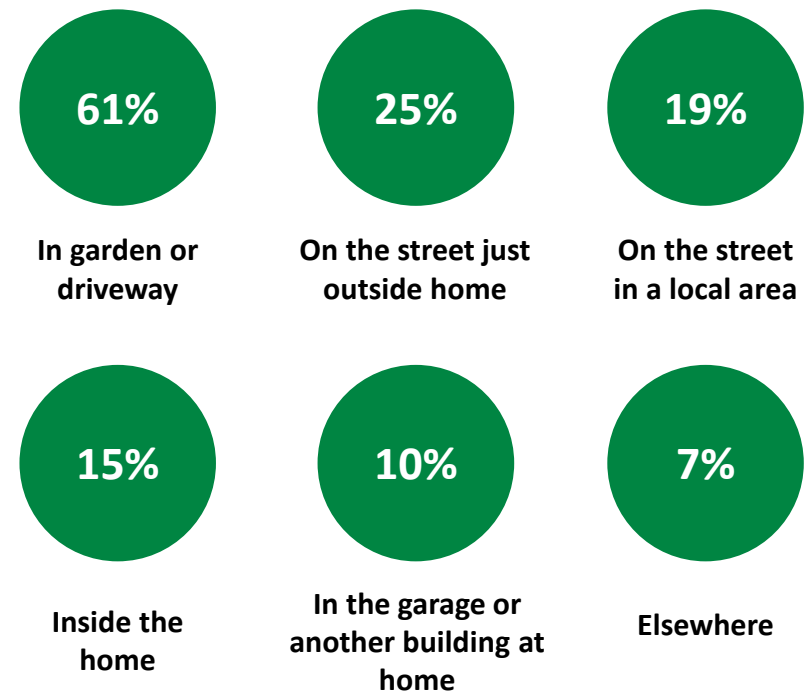
▲ ▼ Significant difference at 95% CI

For those experiencing sewer flooding, it has tended to be on multiple occasions, with gardens / driveways the most commonly affected location

Frequency of sewer flooding incident:
All respondents



Location of sewer flooding incident:
Those who have experienced sewer flooding



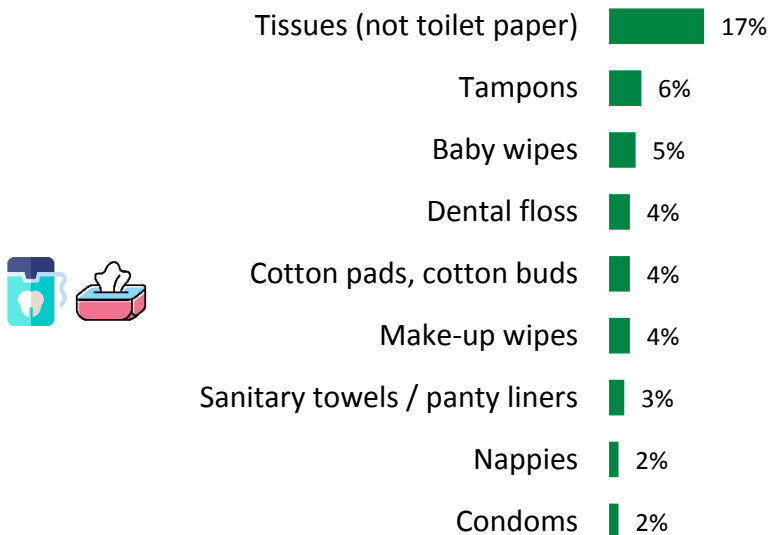
▲ ▼ Significant difference at 95% CI

Q2. Now thinking about issues related to the services that United Utilities supplies... Have you experienced any of the following? If you have experienced them on more than one occasion, please think about the most recent occurrence. Q3. On how many separate occasions have you experienced sewer flooding at or near your home (not including roadside flooding or large puddles)? Base: All respondents (n=4494). Q4. which of the following locations did you experience the sewer flooding (not including roadside flooding or large puddles)? Base: All those experiencing flooding at or near their home (n= 2096) Source: Repeat Sewer Flooding Survey (February 2022)

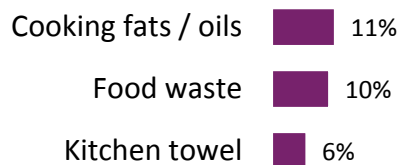
Half of customers admit to being a 'flusher'. Tissues and toilet wipes are the most commonly disposed of items, along with hair and kitchen-related items

**Items disposed of down toilet, sink or drain in last 12 months:
All respondents**

Hygiene / Personal care

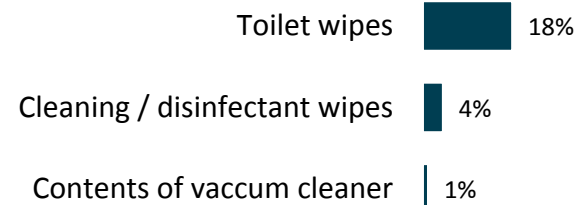


Kitchen

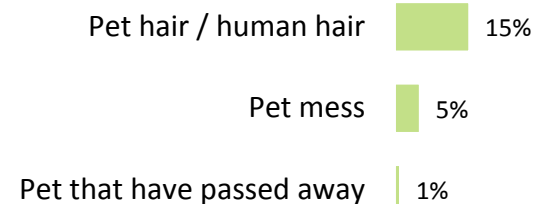


50%
have disposed of at least one item in the last 12 months

Cleaning

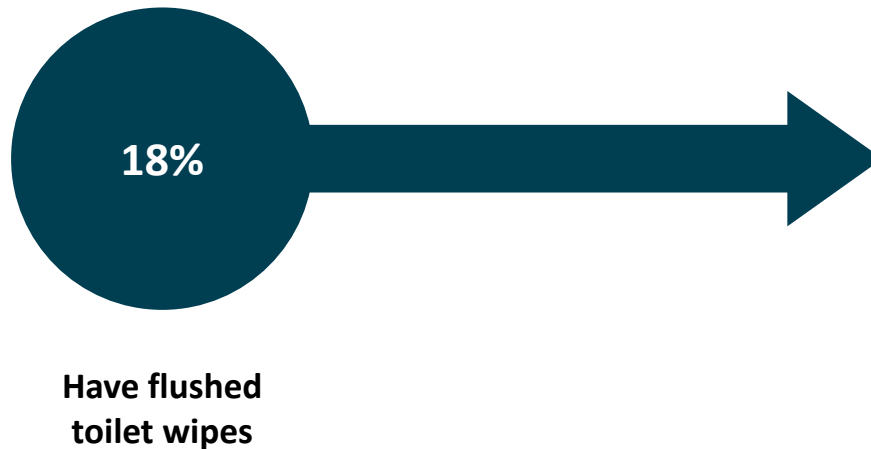


Pet

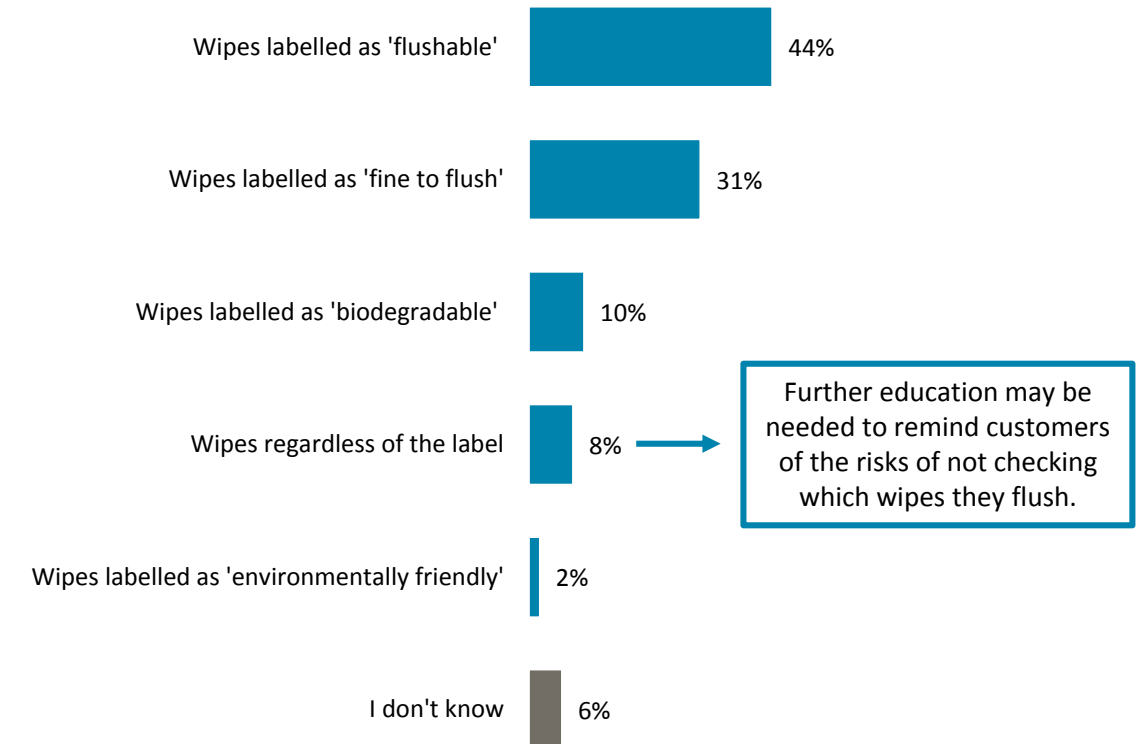


One in six have flushed toilet wipes in the past year, mainly those marked as being okay to flush. A minority (8%) say they flush wipes regardless of the label

Toilet wipes flushing behaviour:
All respondents



Types of toilet wipes disposed of:
All who have flushed toilet wipes



Sewer flooding valuation

Setting the scene for the conjoint exercise

Before we introduced the conjoint exercise to customers within the survey, we wanted to lay some groundwork by introducing the various consequences of sewer flooding that they would be evaluating.

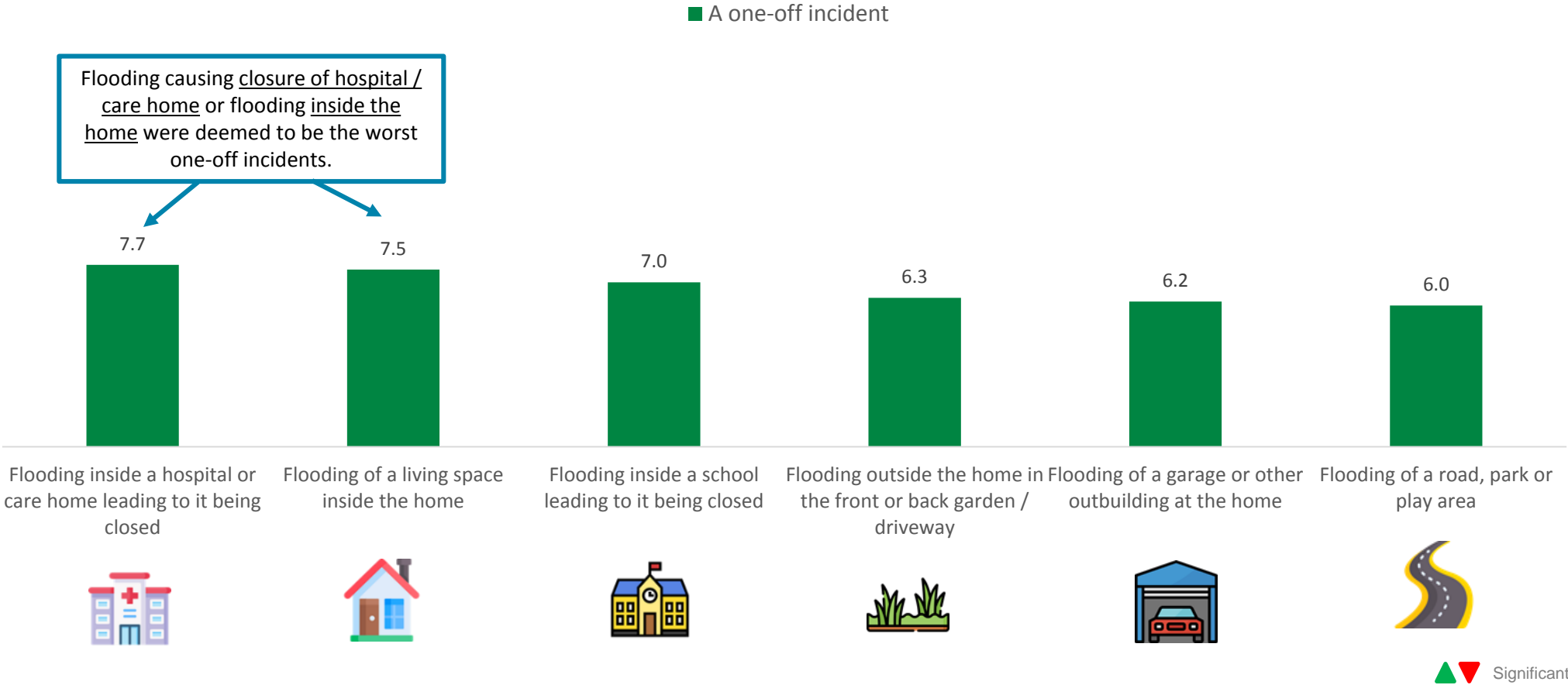
We asked them directly to rate how bad they thought a specific consequence of sewer flooding was and how that rating would differ based on whether it was a one-off incident, repeat incidents and repeat incidents caused by sewer blockages / severe weather.

To minimise the effort for customers and to keep the survey length more manageable, everyone was asked about a single randomly selected sewer flooding consequence.



Looking at one-off incidents on their own, the worst impacts of sewer flooding are felt to be closure of a hospital / care home or inside the home

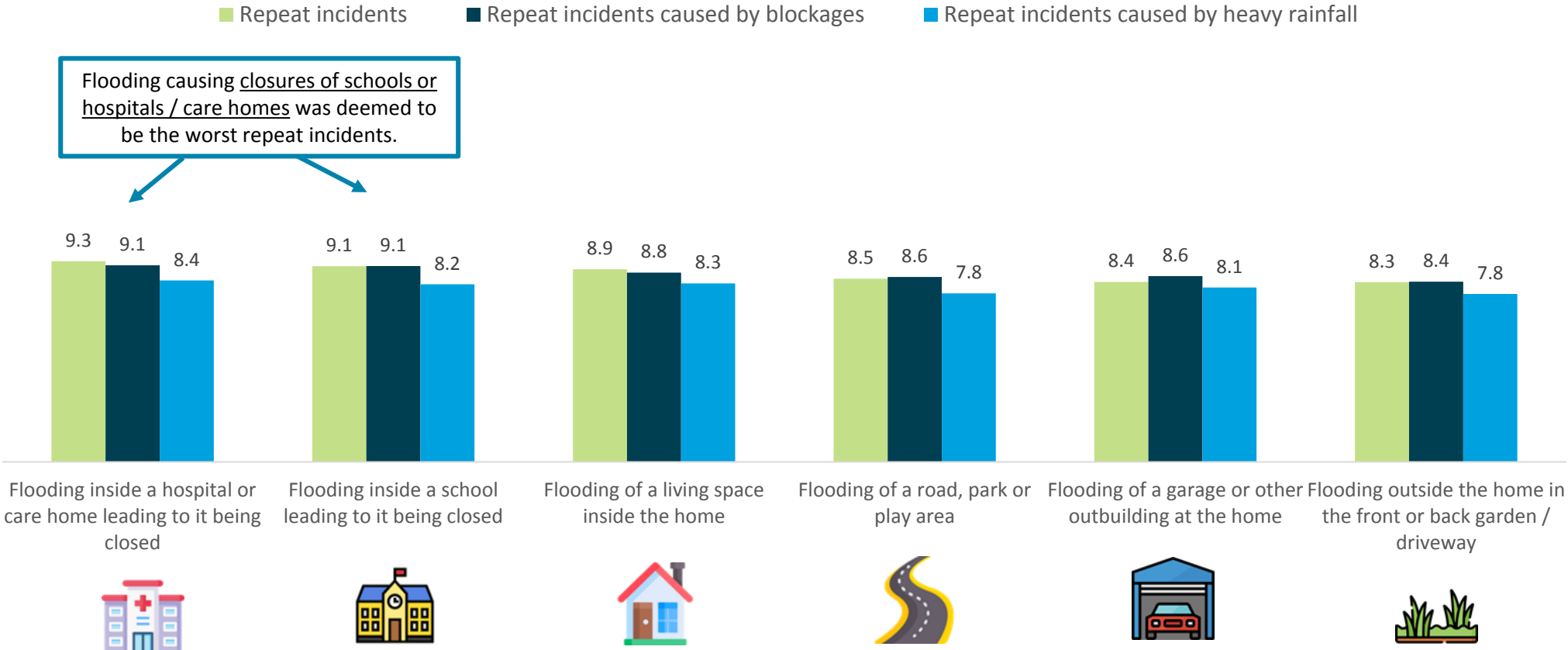
**One-off flooding (mean score from 0-10 scale):
All respondents**



▲ ▼ Significant difference at 95% CI

Then focusing on repeat incidents of sewer flooding, the worst impact is felt to be closure of a hospital / care home or closure of a school

**Repeat flooding (mean score from 0-10 scale):
All respondents**



▲ ▼ Significant difference at 95% CI

Certain subgroups are more likely to perceive different impacts of sewer flooding as being 'bad'



Flooding inside a school leading to it being closed



Flooding inside a hospital or care home leading to it being closed



Flooding of a living space inside the home



Flooding of a garage or other outbuilding at the home



Flooding outside the home in the front or back garden / driveway



Flooding of a road, park or play area

Customer cohorts more likely to perceive the consequence as being 'bad'

- Aged 30+
- Homeowners
- Non-flushers
- Coastal
- No kids at home
- Non-disabled

- CRM and WaterTalk sample
- Aged 30+
- Homeowners
- Cumbria

- WaterTalk and Nat Rep sample
- Aged 30+
- Coastal
- Haven't experienced sewer flooding

- WaterTalk and Nat Rep sample
- Women
- Aged 40-69
- Non-coastal locations
- Older kids at home
- Pet owners
- Non-vulnerable
- Haven't experienced sewer flooding

- Women
- Homeowners
- Non-vulnerable
- Aged under 70
- Cumbria
- Haven't experienced sewer flooding
- Kids at home

- Aged 40-69
- Cumbria
- Kids at home
- Metered
- Haven't experienced sewer flooding

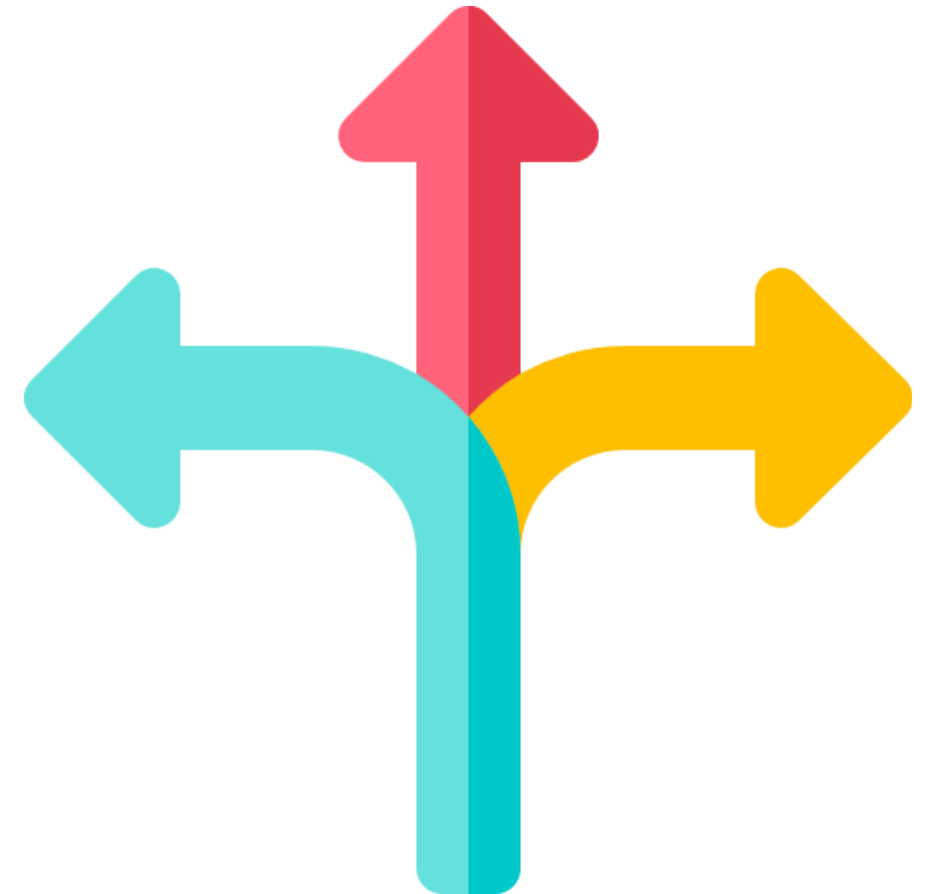
Introducing the choice-based conjoint analysis

What customers *say* is important, and what really matters to them, are not necessarily the same thing. Customers tend to claim that *everything* is important, and therefore have difficulty giving indications of relative importance.

Conjoint is a trade-off comparison technique which we used to force customers to trade-off between preventing different sewer flooding scenarios. This allowed us to capture which sewer flooding scenarios customers really think are important to prevent, what they really value and ultimately help United Utilities to determine where to prioritise resources.

It enables us to estimate the size of any repeat flooding factor and how this varies by consequence / impact, the type of flooding and the cause of flooding.

The % scores are not absolute and shouldn't be treated as such: they help us to understand attribute sensitivity.



Conjoint exercise: How it works

Each customer was shown 3 sewer flooding scenarios at a time, each differing in the attributes and levels (details of these are on the next slide). Each customer was asked to choose which of the 3 situations they thought was the most important to prevent. This exercise was done a total of 12 times for each customer.

With this information it is possible to model how a customer would react to any possible scenarios they might be shown.

The results of these choices are then aggregated across all customers and provide us with an understanding of how important both the elements are in comparison to each other AND which attributes are the most important parts of these options.

? Which one of the following sewer flooding scenarios do you personally think is the most important to prevent?

Screen: 1 of 12

Consequence / impact	Flooding outside the home but in the garden / driveway	Flooding inside a hospital or care home leading to it being closed	Flooding inside a school leading to it being closed	
Type of flooding	Foul water flooding	Rainwater flooding	Rainwater flooding	None of these
Frequency of flooding	Once every 3 years	Once every 10 years	One-off incident	
Cause of flooding	Severe weather	Unspecified	Sewer blockages	
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17% BACK NEXT

Conjoint exercise: the attributes and levels of sewer flooding that were tested within the survey

Conjoint Grid			Levels					
			1	2	3	4	5	6
Attributes	1	Consequence	Flooding inside a school leading to it being closed	Flooding inside a hospital or care home leading to it being closed	Flooding of a living space inside the home	Flooding of a garage or other outbuilding at the home	Flooding outside the home but in the garden / driveway	Flooding outside the home on open space / road
	2	Frequency of consequence occurring	One-off incident	Every 3 years	Every 10 years			
	3	Type of flooding	Rainwater flooding	Foul water flooding				
	4	Cause of flooding	Sewer blockages	Heavy rainfall	Unspecified			

Introducing the conjoint simulator

Repeat Sewer Flooding Valuation

Select Sample:

Demographics:

Age	All
Region	All
Location type	All
Household composition	All
Bill payers	All
Flushers	All
Metered	All
Property status	All

SEG	All
Disabled	All
Vulnerable	All
Pets	All
Children	All
Have experienced repeated flooding	All
Length of time since the last experienced	All



In this section of the simulator, you can filter results by Demographic subgroups

Selected Sample Size: 4,413



The base size will update based on the filter selection – it is not recommended to interpret the results if the base size is lower than 100.

Select Scenario:

Product	Include	Consequence / impact	Type of flooding	Frequency of flooding	Cause of flooding
1	Y	Flooding inside a hospital or care home leads to	Rainwater flooding	One-off incident	Sewer blockages
2	Y	Flooding inside a hospital or care home leads to	Rainwater flooding	Once every 3 years	Sewer blockages
3	Y	Flooding inside a hospital or care home leads to	Rainwater flooding	Once every 10 years	Sewer blockages
4	N				
5	N				
6	N				
7	N				
8	N				
9	N				
10	N				
11	N				
12	N				
13	N				
14	N				
15	N				
16	Y	None of these	n/a	n/a	n/a

Share of Preference - the proportion of customers selecting the flooding scenario as the most important to prevent.
18.78%
61.61%
17.53%
2.08%



To calculate the share of preference, first set the consequence you are looking at, then the type / frequency / cause of flooding.

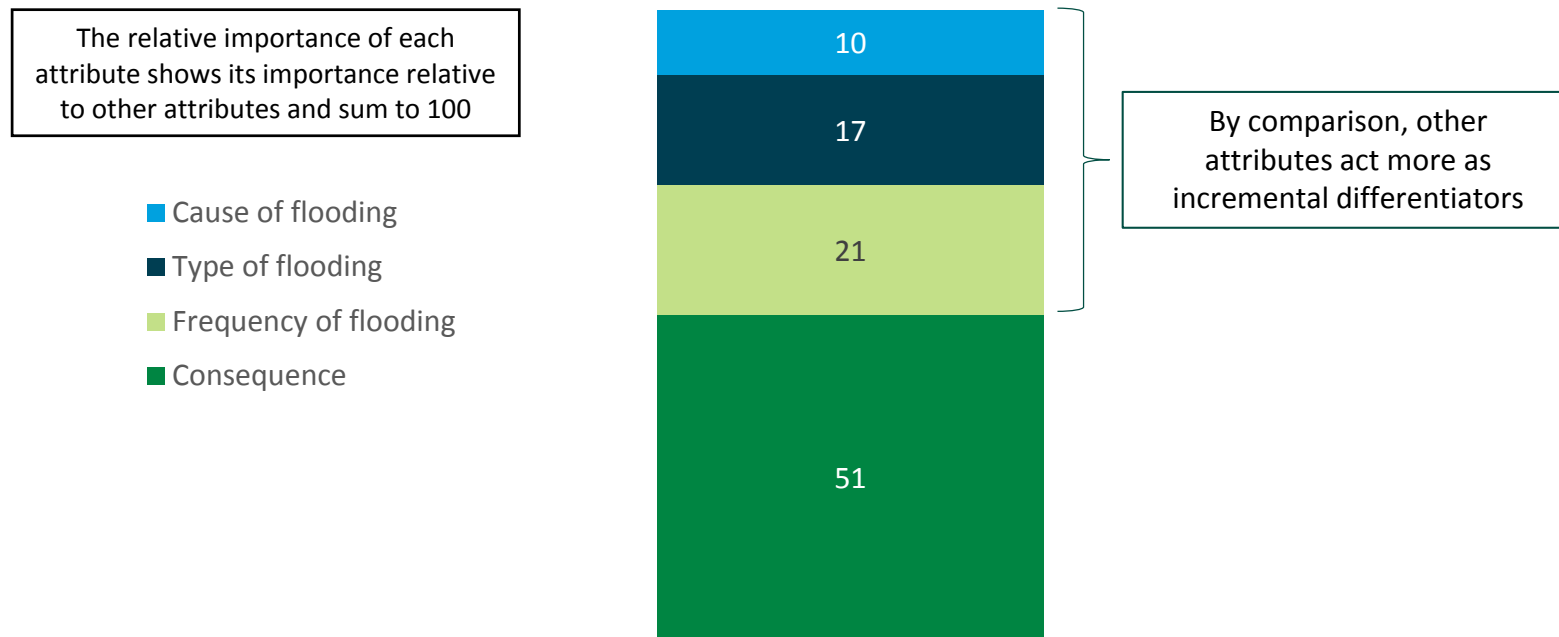
With this example here, we can determine how much more important it is to prevent repeat flooding causing closure of a hospital / care home compared to a one-off incident.

Taking a one-off incident as the baseline frequency, we would then calculate the increase in importance (i.e. the share of preference) if it happened every 3 years or every 10 years.

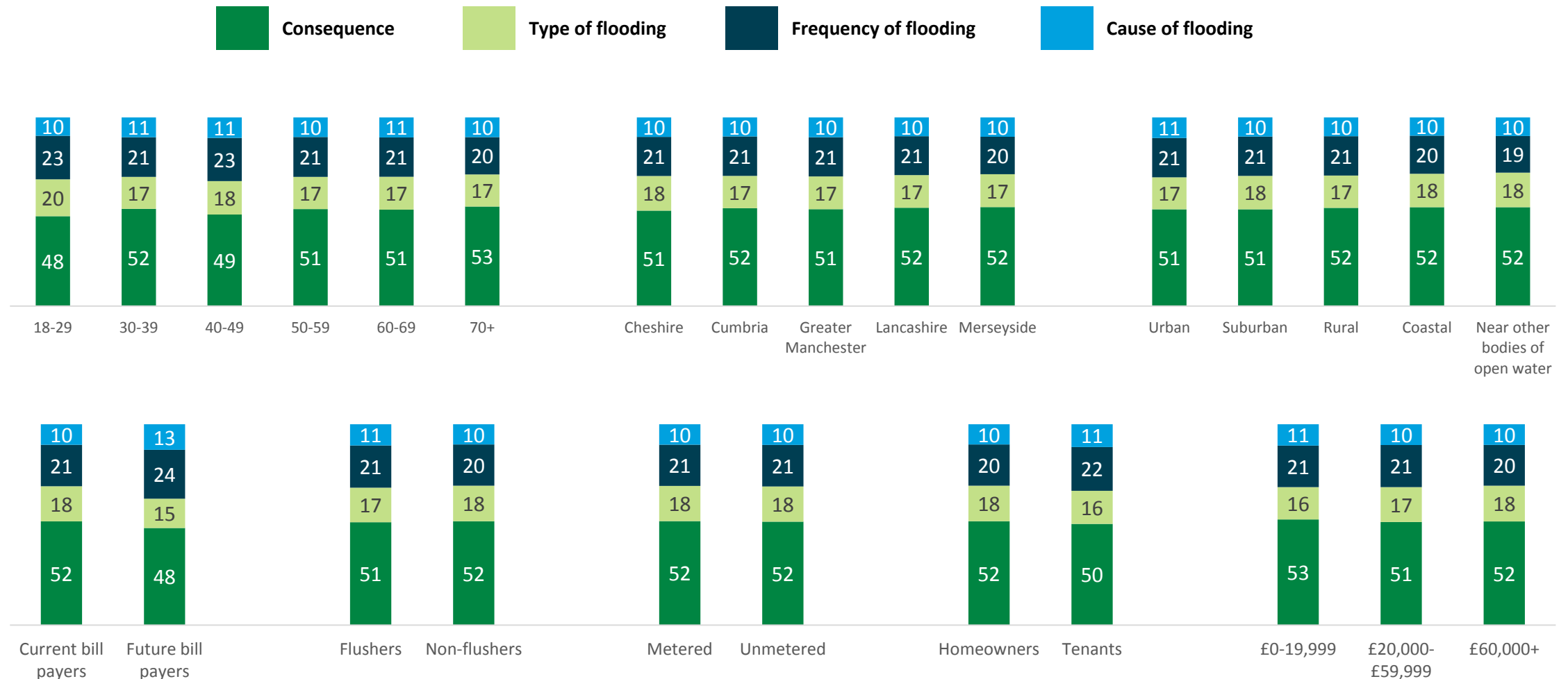
With the data in this example, the increase in importance would be
Once every 3 years: 62% / 19% = 3.26
Once every 10 years: 18% / 19% = 0.95

Of the attributes tested, the consequence of sewer flooding is the most important influence on customers when choosing the most important scenarios for UU to prevent

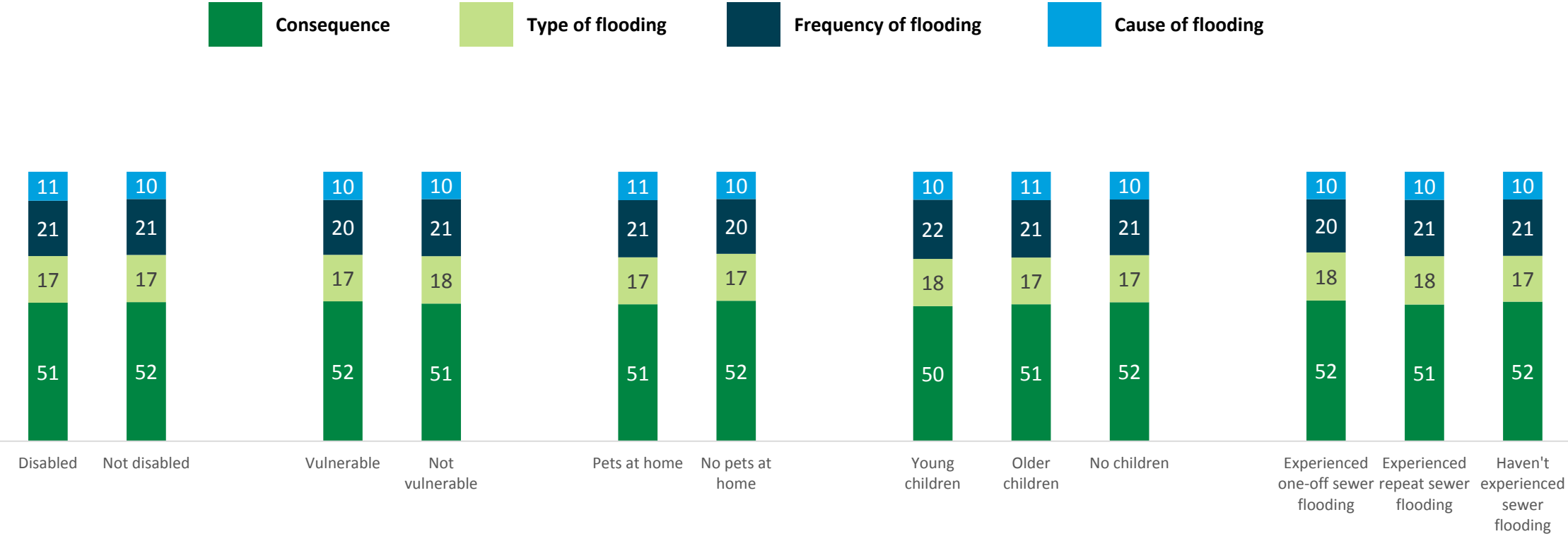
Relative importance of sewer flooding attributes



There is little difference in what influences decision-making across all subgroups, with the consequence of sewer flooding the most important factor to prevent

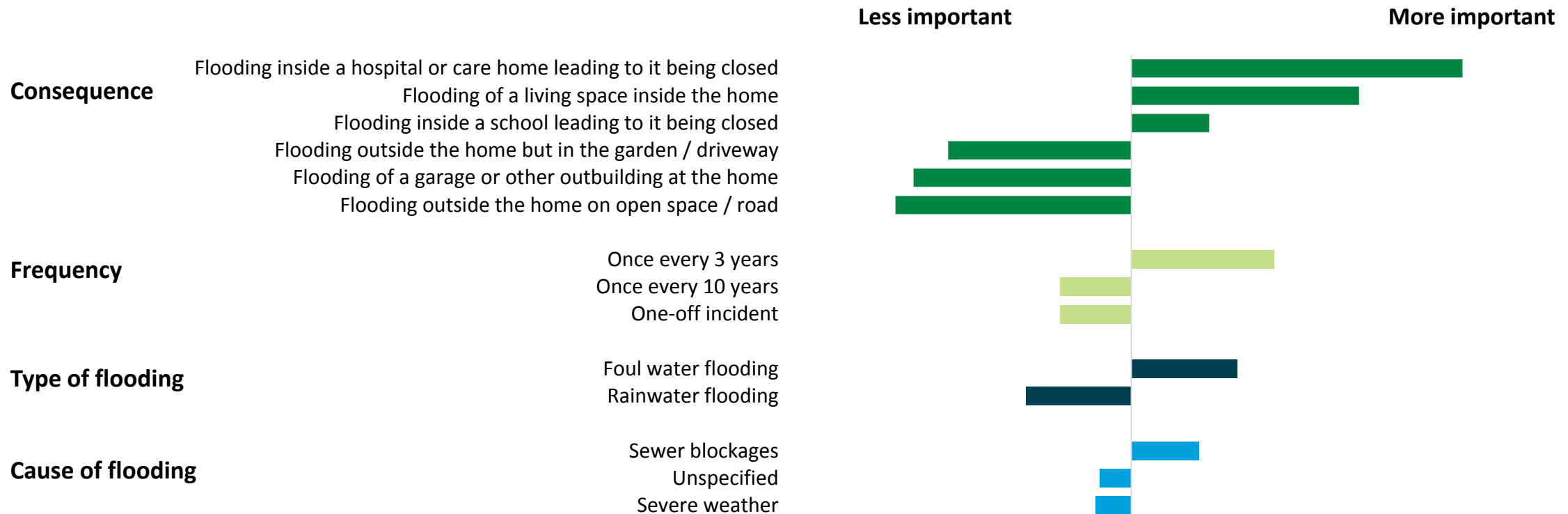


There is little difference in what influences decision-making across all subgroups, with the consequence of sewer flooding the most important factor to prevent



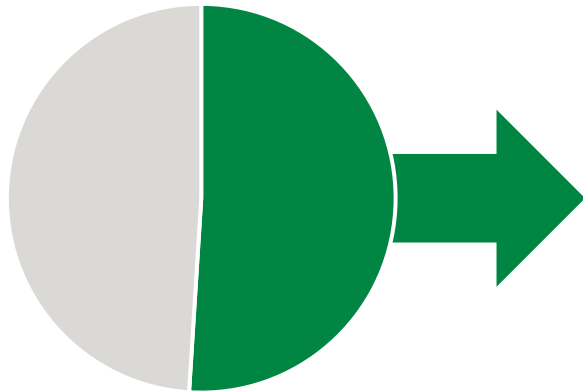
The most important scenario to prevent would be foul water flooding causing closure of a hospital / care home, that happens every 3 years, due to sewer blockages

Relative importance of sewer flooding elements



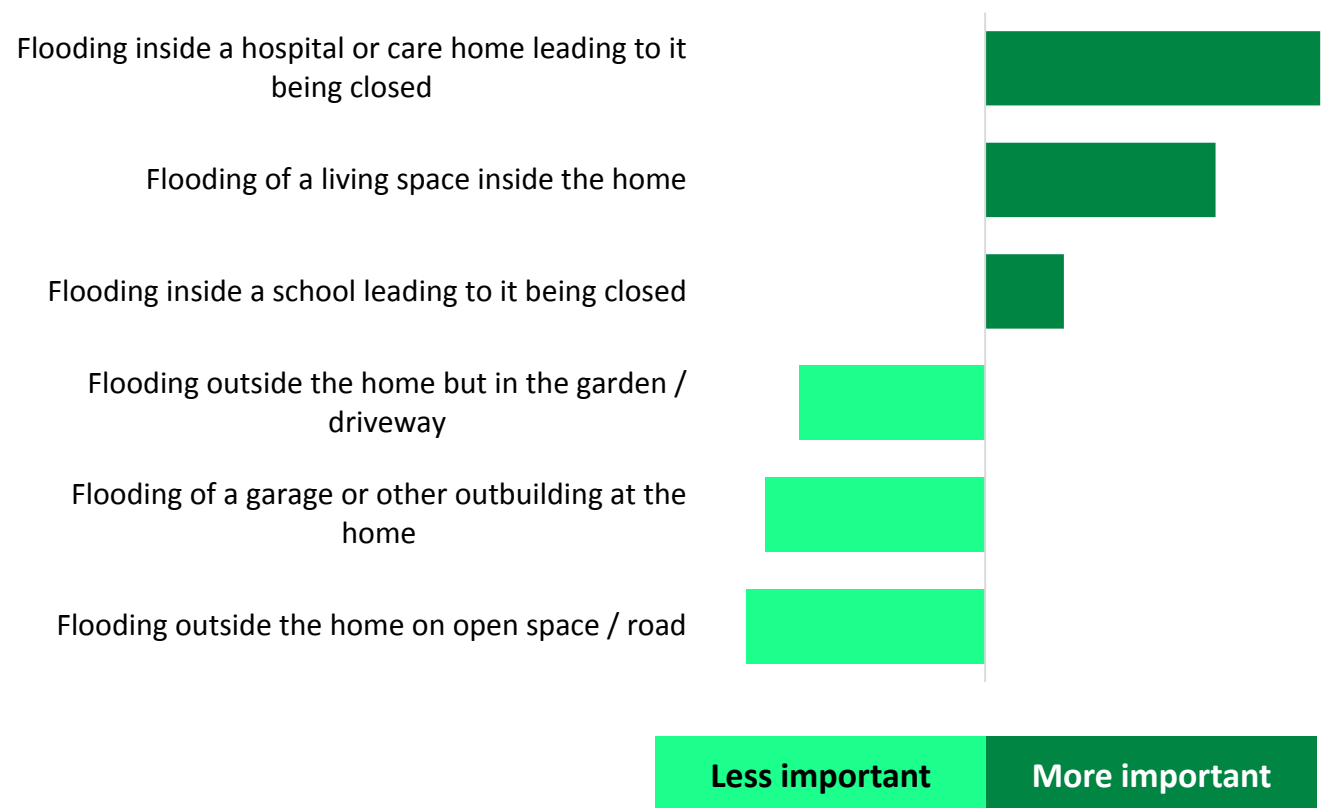
Closure of a hospital or care home is the consequence of flooding that customers believe is the most important to prevent

'Consequence of flooding' makes up 51% of preference decision



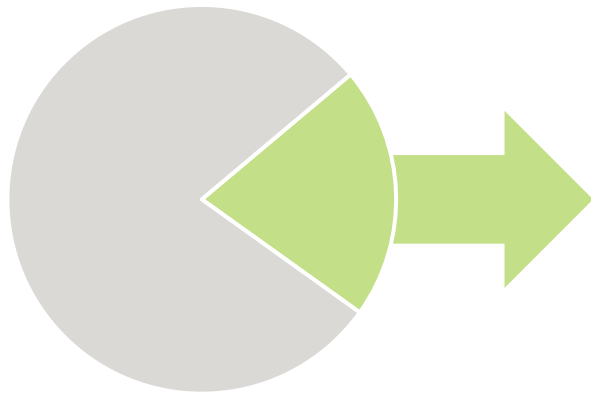
The pandemic is likely to be still fresh in many customers' minds, which may have influenced the strength of feeling towards closure of a hospital / care home compared to the other consequences.

Relative importance of sewer flooding consequences



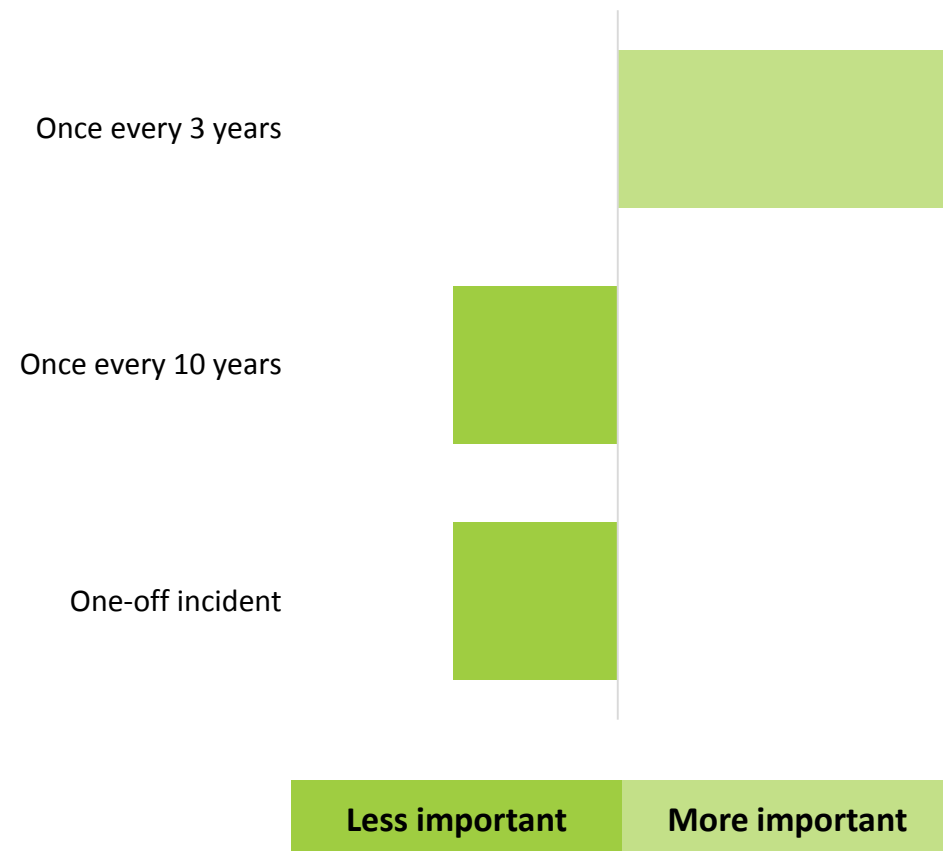
It's key for customers that flooding that would happen every 3 years on average is prioritised for prevention

'Frequency of flooding' makes up 21% of preference decision



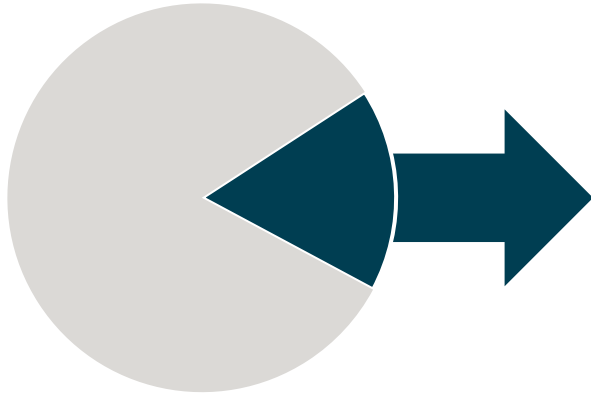
Flooding once every 3 years clearly feels too frequent for most customers, while being more acceptable of one-offs or an incident every decade.

Relative importance of sewer flooding frequency



Foul water flooding is deemed to be more important to prevent compared to rainwater flooding

'Type of flooding' makes up 17% of preference decision

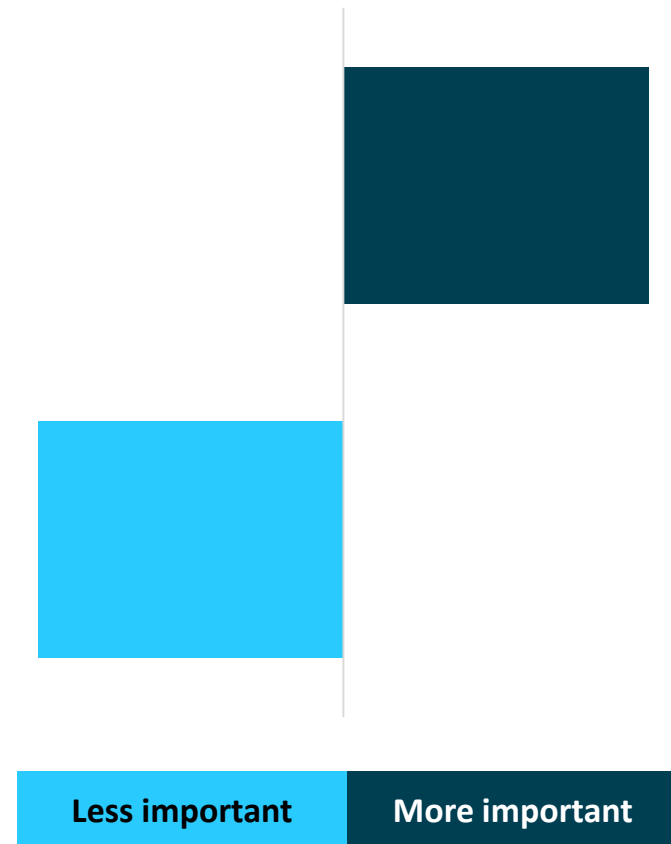


Customers place greater importance on preventing foul water flooding, perhaps as it is easy to imagine the distress and damage it would cause comparatively to rainwater flooding.

Relative importance of sewer flooding type

Foul water flooding

Rainwater flooding

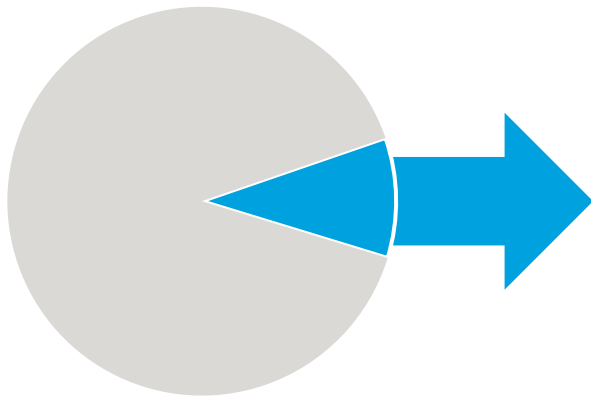


Less important

More important

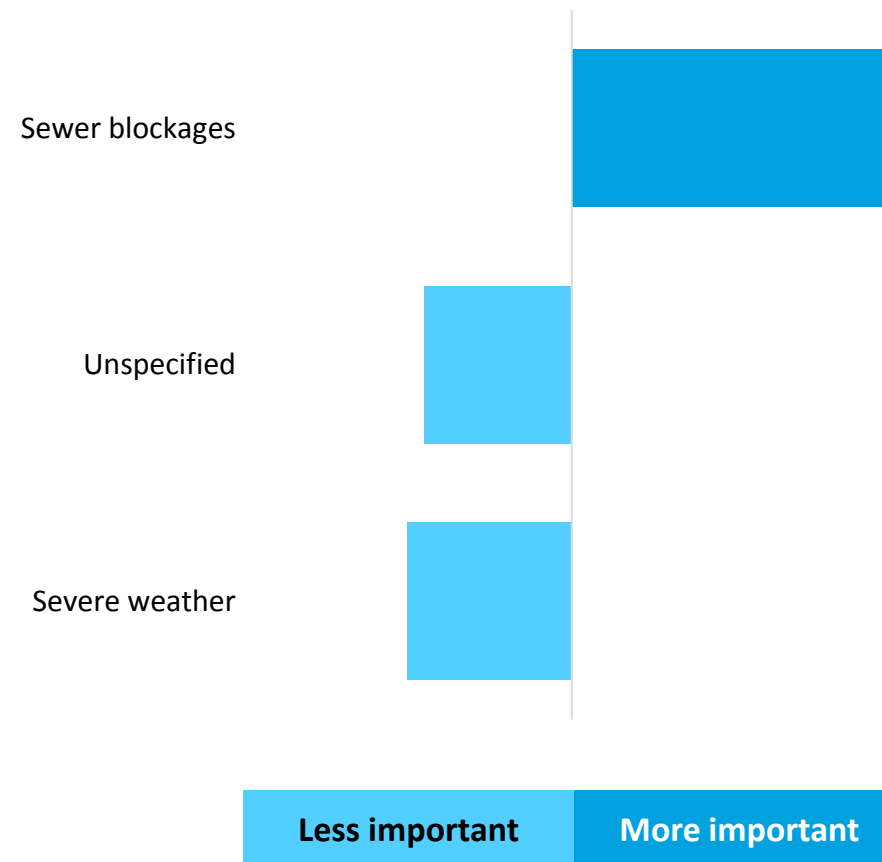
It's more important for customers that flooding caused by sewer blockages is prevented compared to severe weather or unspecified causes

'Cause of flooding' makes up 10% of preference decision



Customers recognise that sewer blockages can be caused by their own actions, which may be why they see this cause of flooding as key to prevent. Conversely, severe weather may feel 'out of their hands' and accepted as unpreventable.

Relative importance of sewer flooding cause



The impact of the type of flooding on customers' priorities

How does the type of flooding impact customers' priorities for sewer flooding prevention?

What happens to the share of preference (*i.e. the proportion of customers selecting the flooding scenario as the most important to prevent*) when the type of flooding is taken into consideration across a range of scenarios?

Looking at each consequence of sewer flooding and keeping the frequency and cause of sewer flooding consistent, we can isolate the impact of the type of flooding on the share of preference for preventing that particular consequence.

We can then calculate the increase in importance by taking the share of preference for rainwater flooding as a baseline and calculating how much bigger the share of preference is for foul water flooding.



Regardless of the frequency, cause or consequence of the flooding, customers think that foul water flooding is about **3 times more important** to prevent compared to rainwater flooding.

Priorities for preventing types of flooding are broadly the same across all customer subgroups.

The impact of repeat flooding on customers' choice compared to a one-off incident

How does the frequency of flooding impact customers' priorities for sewer flooding prevention?

What happens to the share of preference (*i.e. the proportion of customers selecting the flooding scenario as the most important to prevent*) when the frequency of flooding is taken into consideration across a range of scenarios?

Looking at each consequence of sewer flooding and keeping the type and cause of sewer flooding consistent, we can isolate the impact of the frequency of flooding on the share of preference for preventing that particular consequence.

We can then calculate the increase in importance by taking the share of preference for a one-off incident as a baseline and calculating how much bigger the share of preference is for flooding every 3 or every 10 years.



Regardless of the type, cause or consequence of the flooding, customers think that:

One-off incidents and repeat flooding once every 10 years are **equally as important to prevent**

However, compared to a one-off incident, preventing repeat flooding once every 3 years is

over 3 times more important

Priorities for preventing frequency of flooding are broadly the same across all customer subgroups.

The impact of the cause of flooding on customers' choices

How does the cause of flooding impact customers' priorities for sewer flooding prevention?

What happens to the share of preference (*i.e. the proportion of customers selecting the flooding scenario as the most important to prevent*) when the cause of flooding is taken into consideration across a range of scenarios?

Looking at each consequence of sewer flooding and keeping the frequency and type of sewer flooding consistent, we can isolate the impact of the cause of flooding on the share of preference for preventing that particular consequence.

We can then calculate the increase in importance by taking the share of preference for an unspecified cause as a baseline and calculating how much bigger the share of preference is for flooding caused by severe weather or by sewer blockages.

Regardless of the type, cause or consequence of the flooding, customers think that:

Flooding due to severe weather and unspecified causes are
equally as important to prevent

However, compared to an unspecified cause, preventing repeat flooding caused by sewer blockages is

almost twice as important

The increased importance placed on preventing flooding due to sewer blockages may well be due to a sense that it feels more tangible to elicit flushing behaviour change than it is to prevent heavy rainfall.

Re-charging and prosecution of sewer misusers

Re-charging and prosecuting sewer misusers: setting the scene

Customers were provided with background information on the cause and impact of sewer blockages and what UU could do to try to prevent them.

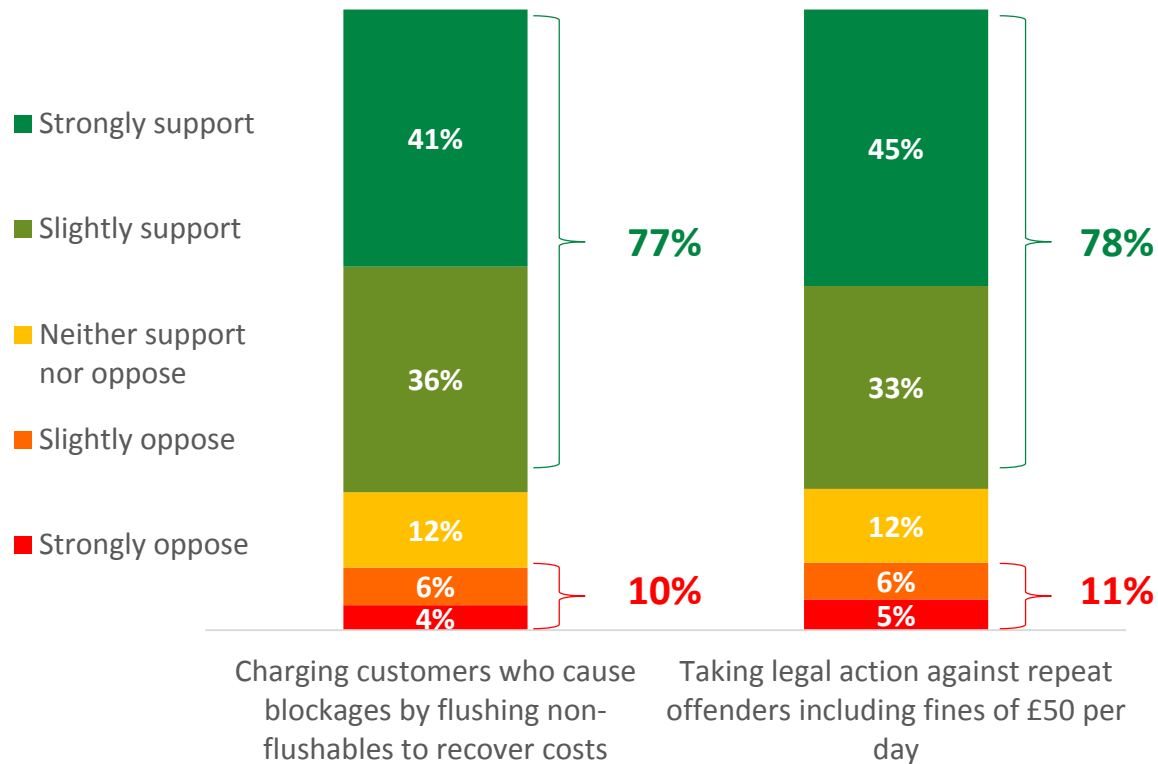
We then introduced two ideas aimed at discouraging customers from disposing of things they shouldn't down the toilet or drain, and we asked customers to rate how much they would support or oppose the introduction of these initiatives:

- Recovery of costs for repair work that United Utilities need to do
- Legal action including fines of up to a maximum of £50 per day while the offence continues, which would be set and enforced through the courts



There is strong support for re-charging those who cause blockages and also for taking legal action against them

Support / opposition for re-charging and prosecuting flushers



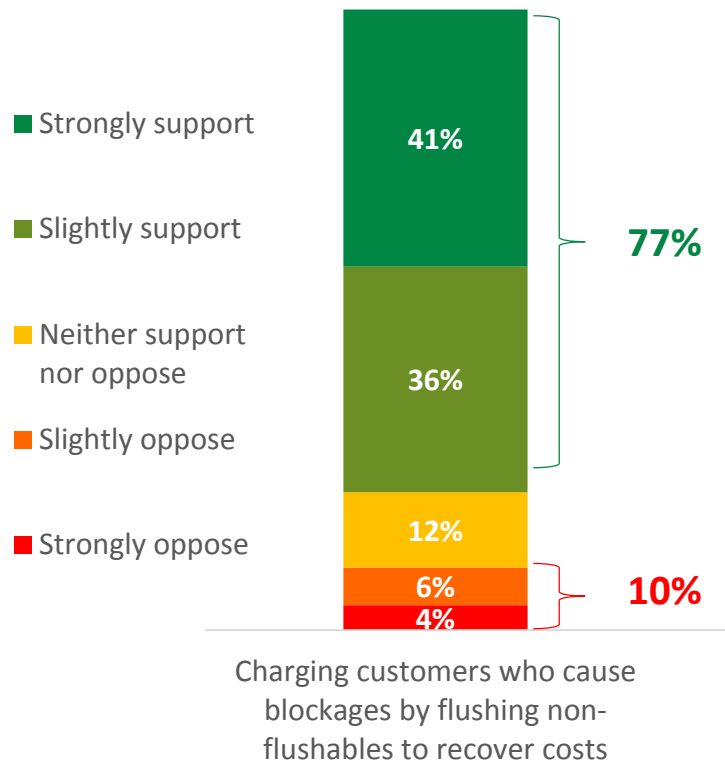
Who's more likely to support these actions?

- | Re-charging | Legal action |
|---|---|
| • Older customers (81% of those aged 60+) | • Men (81%) |
| • Homeowners (80%) | • Older customers (80% of those aged 60+) |
| • Coastal residents (82%) | • Homeowners (81%) |
| • Those without kids at home (78%) | • Those without kids at home (78%) |
| • Current bill payers (78%) | • Current bill payers (78%) |
| • Metered customers (80%) | • Non-disabled customers (79%) |
| • Non-disabled customers (79%) | |

▲ ▼ Significant difference at 95% CI

Holding flushers responsible to act as a deterrent and raising awareness of the impact are main drivers for supporting re-charging

Reasons for support / opposition for re-charging flushers



Holding flushers accountable with money

“ Maybe then the people who flush non-flushables down the drain and toilet will stop doing it when it starts to hit their pockets and costs them.
Male, 40-49

Prevent and discourage flushers’ repeating behavior

“ Once people know how to prevent blockages I think that they should be fined if they continuously disregard the information and cause blockages which impact on others.
Female, 50-59

Raise awareness on consequences of flushers’ behaviour

“ Customers need educating about what can and cannot be flushed into the sewage system. If they persistently ignore the advice then a fine should be issued as it costs all customers more money to clean the sewer system.
Male, Unknown

It is UU’s responsibility to repair damages; not customers’

“ Because United Utilities have a responsibility to make the system fit for purpose.
Male, 30-39

Difficult to accurately determine the flushers

“ You cannot always prove who has caused the blockage. You can only charge people if you have evidence or only them have the drain. If its a shared drain, this procedure cannot be followed.
Female, Unknown

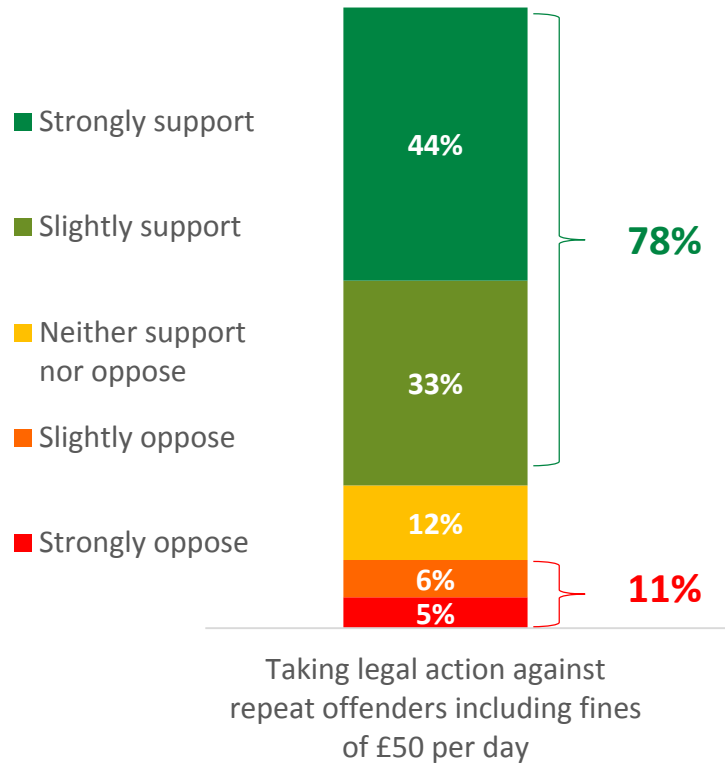
Education is a better long-term solution

“ Education of the public and inducements of good behaviour is always preferable to punishment. Carrot works better long term than the stick.
Female, 30-39

▲ ▼ Significant difference at 95% CI

Prosecuting flushers is deemed to be fair and the last option to stop and discourage flushers

Reasons for support / opposition for prosecuting flushers



Flushers should be held responsible

“ It is not fair on the people who don't do these things, so the people that do should be punished to reduce the cause of flooding.
Female, 18-29

Legal action is the last option for repeat flushers

“ Because they aren't learning their lesson and as it's their fault by being careless there should be punishment so they won't do it again.
Female, 30-39

Costs of damages should pass on to flushers

“ Repeat offenders should be made to pay for these increased costs and protect non-offending customers from unnecessary costs.
Male, 40-49

Process is too difficult to set-up and unrealistic

“ Because the amounts will never be recovered from them, it is difficult to collect fines.
Male, Unknown

Difficult to prove repeat flushing

“ I do not think it would be possible to pinpoint exactly who was causing this problem. All household drains lead to a main sewer so how could it be proven who the guilty party was in, for example, a street of even just 20 houses?
Male, 40-49

Education should be priority

“ This could severely impact someone's quality of life, I think you should try to reach out and educate these individuals about the impact of their actions before you even consider fining.
Female, 30-39

▲ ▼ Significant difference at 95% CI

Conclusions

Conclusions

Of the attributes tested, the consequence of sewer flooding is the most important element for customers when choosing the most important scenarios for UU to prevent. Specifically, it is the prevention of flooding that would lead to closure of a hospital or care home that customers deem most important, and therefore where they would expect most resources to be allocated to.

Beyond the consequences of sewer flooding, customers feel it is most important to dedicate resources to prevent:

- Foul water flooding compared to rainwater flooding
- Flooding that would occur once every 3 years, compared to one-offs or incidents once every 10 years
- Flooding that is caused by sewer blockages as a result of people disposing of items like wet wipes, make-up cotton pads, fats, oil or grease, compared to sewers overflowing because they are full of rainwater

Aligned with the comparatively greater importance that customers place on preventing flooding caused by sewer blockages, support is strong for both re-charging and taking legal action against repeat sewer misusers. As such, it appears that UU has the green light to start testing the waters for this in the real world.

Appendix

Ofwat standards for high-quality research – Repeat Sewer Flooding

Ofwat have set out requirements for High Quality Research in their [Customer Engagement Policy](#). All water company research and engagement should follow best practice and lead to a meaningful understanding of what is important to customers and wider stakeholders.

Useful and contextualised

The insight used from this research was used to guide planning for AMP8 and provided evidence to share with Ofwat in their decision on a common performance measure for sewer flooding.

Fit for purpose

This research was designed to ensure robust insight was gained. Multiple sources were combined and weighted to create a representative sample, including those who has experienced sewer flooding. To ensure customers understood the exercise, an introduction to the topic was made to build knowledge. A conjoint pairwise methodology was chosen to accurately establish customer preferences.

Ethical

This research was conducted by Verve, which is a member of the Market Research Society. Participants were informed that they could be open and honest in their views due to anonymity and Verve and United Utilities were subject to strict data protection protocols.

Continual

The outputs of this research were contextualised using a wide evidence base including research that followed on environmental issues, customer priorities and sewer flooding.

Neutrally designed

Every effort has been made to ensure that the research is neutral and free from bias. Where there is the potential for bias, this has been acknowledged in the report. Participants were encouraged to give their open and honest views and reassurances were given throughout the research that United Utilities were open to hearing their honest opinions and experiences.

Inclusive

Quotas were set based on the known profile of United Utilities' customers and weighted to mitigate variations in the sample population. The research materials went through robust testing to make sure they were accessible and engaging.

Shared in full with others

The research is published and shared on our website and through our industry customer insight newsletter, The Source.

Independently assured

All research was conducted by Verve, an independent market research agency. United Utilities collaborated with Your Voice, the Independent Challenge Group, who reviewed all research materials and provided a check and challenge approach on the method and findings

The WaterTalk panel

- Water Talk is an online community designed to reflect the views of those in the North West who have access to the internet (circa 90% of the population)
- Customer panels typically provide a deeper level of engagement with customers than ad-hoc pieces of research
- It provides rapid research access to UU customers
 - This can provide fast and cost effective feedback on a wide range of issues
- Where appropriate, work is supported with other methodologies and samples to represent those not present on WaterTalk
- Nearly 8,000 UU customers are on the panel:
 - 3,600 have taken part in a research activity in the last 6 months

To find out more about using the WaterTalk panel to meet your business needs, please contact **Shy Sharma**:



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Head of Customer Insight

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