



Water for the North West

United Utilities Water Limited
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Telephone: 01925 237000

unitedutilities.com

Our ref: EIR-513

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Email: EIRRequests@uuplc.co.uk

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your request for environmental information. We appreciate your interest, and we want to let you know that your request has been carefully considered in accordance with the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR).

Your request:

I'd like to know how many burst water mains or water mains leaks there have been in the Whitehaven area over the last two years. I'd also like to know how much water was lost as a result, how long on average the bursts or leaks took to fix.

Our response:

For context, water supply distribution is broken down into Water Supply Zones (WSZ), which are then broken down into District Metered Areas (DMAs), which are the lowest level of granularity for our management and reporting.

Your request relates to bursts and water loss. The way we monitor and report these two aspects of our operation are captured at different levels of granularity, which are described below.

Water loss:

To develop our response, we have taken the information from the 38 DMAs within WSZ 031, which covers Whitehaven, parts of Workington and surrounding areas, and serves circa 25,200 domestic and commercial properties.

It is worth noting that water companies do not directly measure the level of leakage from each individual point of the network where a leak takes place. Instead, we measure the total volume of water that we put into a supply area and then use a combination of measurement and estimates of customer usage to calculate what value is known as 'unaccounted-for water'. Unaccounted-for water includes industrial unmetered users who draw off high volumes of water, household usage above that of estimated usage, misuse of the network, as well as actual leakage from either our network, or from customer supply pipes.

In terms of the actual leakage from water mains and pipes, around 70% of the total is from the network we own and operate, and the other 30% is from customers' pipework (connections from our mains to customer properties).

Over the last 2 years, it is estimated that there has been approximately 3,168 megalitres of unaccounted-for-water in WSZ 031. We estimate that this equates to a leakage level for this WSZ of 25%, a figure that is slightly above our regional average of 22%.

Bursts and repairs:

Information about bursts and repairs is recorded and managed at a regional level and as such our systems do not hold the total number of leaks, or average days to repair data at the granularity you have requested. Therefore, to develop our response, we have taken the information from the “West Cumbria” area. The West Cumbria area is made up of a number of WSZs, ranging from Bowness-on-Solway to Bootle, and east to Keswick.

For some context, when we identify or are alerted to leaks, the work goes through a prioritization process and we aim to inspect and repair high priority leaks within the same day, where possible. For lower priority leaks, it can sometimes take two days to inspect the leak, and in some cases, the timing of the repair can be influenced by factors such as the weather and traffic management requirements.

Over the timeframe that you requested, in the whole of the West Cumbria area, there have been approximately 2200 leaks repaired, and on average, it took approximately 7.81 days to inspect and then carry out the repair.

Managing leakage

Reducing leakage is a priority, and we have significantly reduced levels over recent years. We plan to spend over £50m between 2025 to 2030 to continue reducing leakage levels. Our aim is to reduce leakage by 13% over the next 5 years.

As part of this five-year plan, we are looking to upgrade over 200km of water mains in Cumbria. We’ve also installed over 72,000 sensors across our network which “listen” for leaks, meaning that we can identify and fix leaks before they have an impact on supplies to customers. So far, we’ve seen this approach increase our “find and fix” rate by 17% and reduce the regional average time that customers have interruptions to supply for. All this work and investment will help us build a more resilient water network. You can read more about our plans to tackle leakage [here](#), and more about our full business plan for AMP 8 [here](#).

We are using a number of innovations including satellite imagery, artificial intelligence, and a new ‘no dig’ repair capability. This has shown extremely strong results in trials over the last six months with a 92 per cent success rate, helping us to reduce both the time taken to fix leaks and halving the operational costs of repair. Both of these are key areas of focus as we drive further improvements over the next five years with our dedicated leakage teams working across West Cumbria and the county more generally.

Additionally, our Area Engagement Lead for Cumbria, Kate Stark, would be happy to meet with you to discuss the points raised in your request or any other concerns that you may have. Please let us know if you would like to speak with her, and if so, I will pass on your contact information.

We hope that this response answers your request. However, if you’re not satisfied with how we’ve handled it, you can request an internal review. To do this, please write to us at Environmental Information Office, Haweswater House, Lingley Mere, Warrington, WA5 3LP or email us at EIRRequests@uuplc.co.uk, addressing your request to [REDACTED]

██████████, and explaining why you're unhappy with our response. We'll be very happy to review your request and ensure we've done everything we can to assist you.

Any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of receipt of this response, and we will reply within 40 working days from receipt of the request for internal review.

Many thanks

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We'd love to hear your feedback on how we handled your request! If you have a moment, please complete our short survey [here](#) – your input helps us improve our service.