

Discoloured water

Yellow, orange, brown colouration or black particles in water

The discolouration of mains water is usually due to the presence of iron from corroded pipes. It may contain solid deposits which settle out in a glass or may simply be described as having a yellow or brown tint.

In all circumstances, discoloured water will have an elevated concentration of iron and in heavily discoloured water this can be associated with other metals such as manganese.

The levels of iron and manganese found in discoloured water are unlikely to be harmful to health, in fact both metals are found in abundance in a healthy diet. The water quality standards for iron and manganese are set for aesthetic reasons, since discoloured water looks unpleasant and can result in staining of laundry and sanitary fittings, which are unacceptable to the customer.

The causes of discolouration

The most common reason for the occurrence of discoloured water is the disturbance of corrosion deposits in the water mains. There are water mains in the region which are cast iron, unlined and corroded. Rust particles can become loose when there is a significant change in flow within the main; they are then picked up by the water and cause it to become discoloured.

It is possible for discolouration to be caused by the condition of your service pipe or internal plumbing system. Check whether your neighbours are experiencing discolouration to establish whether the problem is associated with the mains supply.

You are advised to seek advice from an approved plumber if you suspect that your service pipe or internal plumbing is causing discoloured water.

What South West Water is doing about corroded water mains

In 2009, South West Water will finish a major programme to re-line or replace vulnerable water mains throughout the region.

In addition, the company is developing enhanced operational strategies for managing flow rates in water distribution systems. Both these actions will reduce occurrences of discoloured water.

What to do if you experience discolouration

When water is discoloured, do not use washing machines or dishwashers until the water runs clear. To clear discoloured water, run the cold tap nearest to the inlet pipe, which is usually in the kitchen.

Relevant facts:

Unexpected **changes in flow** can occur for a number of reasons. For example, a burst water main, network alterations or the use of water for fire fighting.

A **list of approved plumbers** can be obtained from the South West Water website.

South West Water is responsible for the communication pipe which is the length of pipe between the supply main and the stopcock, which may be in a pavement or driveway.

The homeowner is responsible for the supply pipe which runs between the stopcock and the property boundary.

Many water mains are around 100 years old and therefore require **renovating or replacing**.

If you are a metered customer you can receive a **credit for water run-off due to discolouration**. Please contact our freephone services helpline on the telephone number below for further advice.

If this does not solve the problem, please contact us on the freephone number below for further advice.

White or milky water

A white or milky appearance to water from the cold water tap is caused by entrapped air. This can be confirmed by filling a glass of water, if it clears from the bottom upwards, entrapped air is the cause.

Air can become trapped within water mains during their repair following a burst or following other work which involves cutting into the pipe work. As the main is recharged with water it will become aerated as the pressure is increased. As aerated water runs from the tap, the tiny air bubbles give it a white appearance.

Aeration and discolouration often occur in combination as aeration itself can have a scouring effect which lifts corroded particles.

Aeration can make tastes and odours more noticeable and can cause a white scum to form as the minerals naturally present in the water react with the air, but this is harmless.

Problems with domestic plumbing and multi point boilers rapidly heating water at mains pressure causing dissolved air to come out of solution are also causes of aeration.

Further advice

If you have any further queries regarding water quality or require further information, please contact us on the freephone number below.

Customer services helpline: 0800 169 1144, Minicom: 0800 169 9965

If you experience persistent aeration but your neighbours do not have the same problem, the cause is more likely to be an **internal plumbing issue**.