

Green Living

The sixth leaflet in a series produced in September-November 2021 by the Green Living groups of Avenue St Andrew's United Reformed Church, Southampton, and its ecumenical partners, from material in *The Dorset Green Living Guide* and current versions of related websites
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Water

Climate change and Water

Southern Water says,

"Climate change¹ is a significant issue in the South East because global warming is leading to changes in our weather with an increased threat of droughts and flooding. "The Met Office² has stated that ... 16 of the 17 warmest years on record have occurred since the year 2001.

"The sea is predicted to rise by one metre this century, exposing millions more people to flooding, and, by 2080, annual rainfall in the South East could drop by half." ³

Water at home

In that context, how can we do our part to use less water and use it more carefully?

Firstly, see how much water you actually use, according to meter readings on your bills, or take your own reading at the meter which is probably in the pavement near your entrance.

How does your daily average compare with the figure a few years ago in this panel from *The Dorset Green Living Guide*?

You may already do some of the ways suggested below, but you might like to try more.

After a month or so, take another reading to see the difference – and continue!

Ways to reduce use

If appropriate in your case:

- Fix drips, leaks, overflows.
- Collect cold run-off from hot taps for plants, garden or toilet tank.
- Flush toilets less often.
- Put something in toilet cistern to reduce its capacity, unless yours is a modern water-efficient type.
- Wash clothes and dishes less often, in full loads.
- Select a washing cycle using less water.
- Shower (gentle flow) rather than bath.
- Turn taps off while soaping yourself or brushing teeth.
- Use minimum water needed in kettles and saucepans.
- Use sprinklers for less time and in the cooler part of day, butts to collect rainwater, watering can rather than hose.



For more ways to save water see

- <https://www.southernwater.co.uk/help-advice/how-to-save-water>
- *The Dorset Green Living Guide* <https://greenliving.sustainabledorset.org/> chapter 6

What about bottled water?

An incisive video from *The Story of Stuff* Project
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_e12y9hSOM0

Water companies reducing carbon emissions

Southern Water is “one of the largest users of energy in the South East due to the significant amounts of energy needed to pump water and wastewater around the region and treat it.” ⁴

Southern Water’s carbon footprint of around 280 kilotonnes of ‘carbon dioxide equivalent’ (that includes methane and nitrous oxide from sewage treatment) mainly resulted from national grid electricity from fossil fuels.

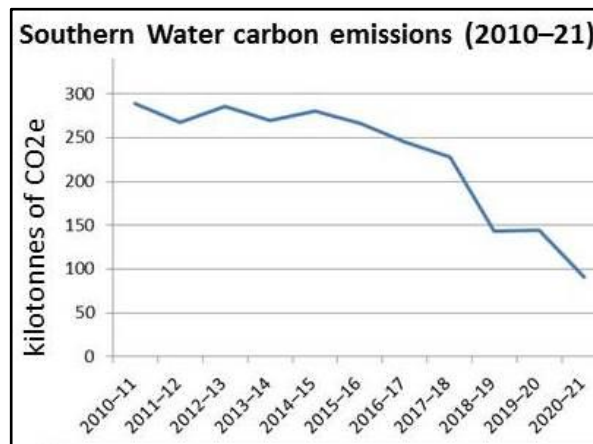
This was reduced to about 90 kilotonnes through:

- changing electricity supplier to draw from renewable sources
- generating their own power
 - 74 GWh ‘power from poo’ (using biogas from biosolids to make power and heat)
 - 3 GWh from solar panels (surplus to grid)
- changing to electric vehicles
- efficiency improvements.

This was well on the way to Southern Water’s pledge of net zero carbon emissions by 2030. ⁴

But in 2024 they revised their net zero target date

to 2050, because of population growth, more customers to serve, and more investment required. ⁵ Southern Water’s Climate Change Adaptation Report, 2024, begins, “To date, efforts on climate change, globally and in the UK, have focused on cutting greenhouse gas emissions and moving toward ‘Net Zero’ targets, but the emissions already in the atmosphere mean we must also prepare for unavoidable climate impacts.” ⁶



Water companies improving water use ...

Water companies across England & Wales reduced leakage by a third since the 1990s.

In 2019 they pledged⁷ to work together to triple the rate of leakage reduction by 2030. E.g. in 2020-21 Southern Water installed 7,400 acoustic loggers to detect leaks, and repaired 20,000 leaks. ⁴ Since privatisation 30 years ago⁷, the water industry in England and Wales has spent around £160 billion improving pipes, pumping stations, sewers and treatment centres.

... and spoiling the environment ...

Water companies have been found guilty of major sewage pollution of waterways, e.g. Southern Water, fined £90 million in July 2021 for frequent spillage in 2010-2015. ⁸ The company Chairman immediately acknowledged, “Southern Water did not meet the expectations of the customers we exist to serve. We failed to protect our precious environment in southern England. For that we are profoundly sorry.” And he described, “an entirely new leadership team [since 2017], delivering root and branch changes to the culture, governance and delivery capabilities of the business.” ⁹ Yet, problems have been many and widespread.

... so Governments seek better ways

An Independent Water Commission set up by UK and Welsh governments in 2024, analysed over 50,000 responses giving evidence, and reported in July 2025. It gave 88 recommendations for greater consumer protection, stronger environmental regulation, public health reforms and tighter oversight through single integrated water regulators and a National Water Strategy for each country, because “Climate change, population growth and economic development will put huge pressure on water systems over the coming decades. ...fully joined-up regulation is essential.” ¹⁰

For more information on these subjects you may like to click on these footnotes (for awareness and understanding, which may be useful during contact with your MP or water company).

¹ <https://www.southernwater.co.uk/water-for-life/protecting-the-environment/climate-change>

² <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/climate-change/what-is-climate-change> & graph in our leaflet 1

³ <https://www.southernwater.co.uk/our-story/water-resources-planning>

⁴ https://www.southernwater.co.uk/media/4931/5585_net_zero_report_a4_v10.pdf

⁵ <https://www.southernwater.co.uk/about-us/our-plans/net-zero-plan/>

⁶ https://www.southernwater.co.uk/media/norffke/climate_change_adaptation_report_2024.pdf

⁷ <https://www.water.org.uk/news-item/water-industry-reaffirms-pledge-to-work-in-the-public-interest/>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/record-90m-fine-for-southern-water-following-ea-prosecution>

⁹ <https://www.southernwater.co.uk/about-us/environmental-performance/> (section 4)

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/roadmap-to-rebuild-trust-in-water-sector-unveiled-in-major-new-report>