

# Now that IS wate

By **Eamon Donoghue**  
and **Senan Molony**

IRISH Water has advised those with lead in their water to fill their sink up to three times in the morning and then let the water go down the drain.

However, the company won't offer a waiver to help householders cover the cost of the wasted water.

Until the mid-Seventies, lead was used in many buildings' pipe networks, while the pipes connecting buildings to the mains supply were often also made out of the harmful metal.

On its own website, Irish Water links any questions about lead to HSE documents advising people on how to deal with the problem.

The advice includes testing your water and replacing all lead piping on your property. It also advises householders to run their taps in the morning to get rid of contaminated water – or water that has been left unused for a period of time.

Exposure to lead can affect the development of a child's brain leading to behaviour and learning problems. It can harm the kidneys, may contribute to high blood pressure and has also been linked to cancer.

The water supply in more than 55,000 houses is contaminated because of lead piping, the Dáil heard recently,

## Residents of homes with lead pipes told to fill – and empty – sinks three times a day to get rid of metal

with the issue also affecting schools. On its website, Irish Water states: 'Where the level of lead in the water from the cold tap at the kitchen sink is above the new legal level (10 micrograms per litre) running it before using the water for drinking or cook-

**'It will vary from house to house'**

ing can sometimes lower the level of lead. This is done first thing in the morning and if the water has been in the pipes for some time.

'The amount of water you need to

run off will vary from house to house. The only way to know the right amount is by testing and retesting the water.'

It says the amount can vary between one and three sinks-worth of water. The advice also suggests that people should 'ideally' not waste the water – but use it for 'washing something such as the windows or the car'.

Waterford Independent TD John Halligan told the Irish Daily Mail yesterday that he feels it is extremely unfair for people to be charged for carrying out a health precaution.

'It's just incredible that you would be asked to fill a sink and then flush water down the plughole – and then be charged for taking a health precaution,' he said.

'I know that there are officials going around suggesting you should fill up your sink three times – and let it out three times – because that represents the level of water that has been lying in your pipes overnight.'

'The understanding is that minute levels of lead can be dangerous, built up over time, as it would be in your body if you were drinking it every day. A lot of water lies in your pipes overnight and that is where the transfer takes place over a number of hours.'

In a statement, Irish Water said that most lead piping occurs on residents' property and is therefore not its responsibility.

'The communication pipe (the

**'Charged for taking a health precaution'**

responsibility of Irish Water) is typically 10 per cent of the total length of service pipe (the responsibility of the home owner),' it said. 'On replacing the service pipe, Irish Water does not intend to address lead service pipe in the customer's property as this is the responsibility of the owner.'

'Even if all communications pipe were replaced, it would not eliminate cases of lead exceedance as the service pipe (on the customer side) is the far greater length and therefore the principal source of the lead.'

Last year Waterford County Council wrote to residents telling them that if their 'house was built prior to 1970 you are advised as a precau-

## CAN THAT BE RIGHT? THE



Cutting back: Timmy Barry

**TIMMY BARRY**

Wednesday's meter reading: **1193**

Thursday's meter reading: **1307**

Usage: **114 litres**

**SINGLE** worker Timmy Barry from Carrigaline, Co. Cork, said he was not too surprised his water usage fell below the official estimates given by the Commission for Energy Regulation of 120 litres per day.

He lives on his own in a semi-detached house and has been very careful with his water usage ever since metering started on Wednesday morning.

'I suppose in the past 24 hours I have been consciously not been using as much water as I would have done before because of the charge,' he said. Mr Barry says most of the conservation steps is taking are simple. 'When brushing your teeth maybe turning off the tap in between brushes, maybe not flushing the toilet as much but in saying that I did have two showers in the past 24 hours,' he added.

## THE PRENDERGASTS

Wednesday's meter

reading: **9180**

Thursday's meter

reading: **9209**

Water used: **29 litres**

**CAROLINE** Prendergast believes her family would use well above the average amount of water because of the needs of her eight-year-old son Conor, who is profoundly disabled and requires 24-hour care.

But the meter readings at her home in Clane, Co. Kildare, show her house used just 29 litres over a 24-hour period, raising suspicions that it's not working properly.

'I don't know, to me it's all a big headache,' she said.

'If Conor becomes unwell you have to handwash everything, wash, wash, wash,' she explained, when asked about her extra water use.

Hydrocephalus sufferer Conor also has a twin, Amy, and an older brother, Adam.



Bills: Caroline with her children

tion to let the cold water kitchen tap run until it fills the kitchen sink, particularly first thing in the morning or if the water has been unused in the pipe for a period of six hours or more'.

George Larkin from Passage East

in Co. Waterford, who told the Mail that he has been following the advice of the council for the past three years, told the Mail: 'We fill it [the sink] at least once a day, and twice a lot of days.'

'That's a sinkful of 14 litres every

## WE DID NOT 'MAKE UP' OUR FIGURES ON

IRISH Water has vigorously denied that it 'made up' data to support its decision to set the free child water allowance at 21,000 litres per year.

The claim was made in yesterday's Irish Daily Mail on the basis that no study has ever been carried out which specifically measured the individual use of water by Irish children alone.

But in a statement yesterday, Irish Water communications chief Elizabeth Arnett said that the 21,000 figure was based on detailed studies of water use across a range of Irish households, most of

them including children. And she said the Irish Water calculations had been accepted by both the regulator and the ESRI.

Ms Arnett said in her statement: 'Irish Water would like to reassure customers that the allowances for children have been set based on actual data (including data from children); from statistically robust samples and the conclusions have been independently verified by the ESRI and have been approved by the regulator (Commission for Energy Regulation). Our child water figures are real, current and robust.'

'In drawing our conclusions about the consumption of children, Irish Water gathered a huge amount of data about water usage in Ireland. We looked at consumption across 7,000 households initially and followed that up with household surveys of over 3,000 samples.'

'This makes it the most comprehensive water consumption study ever undertaken in Ireland.'

'Irish Water gathered actual meter readings from households and then followed up with door-to-door surveys so we could understand how much water each

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**Irish Daily Mail**