

Top tips for complying with your water abstraction licence

1 Licence holder's details

Please check that the name and address on the licence are correct. If they're not, you might get charged when you shouldn't, or legal action may be taken against you if the new holder breaches a condition of the licence. If you've just taken over the licence or given your licence to someone else, please tell us. You can do this by calling us on our customer service line. For easy reference, we suggest you keep a copy of your licence at the site where you abstract the water.

2 Source of supply and point(s) of Abstraction

Make sure that you are only abstracting water from the source set out in your licence and at the location(s) identified. If you're not sure, please check with us.

3 Purpose of abstraction

Only use water for the purpose(s) described in your licence. If you want to use water for a different purpose, you may need to apply to vary your licence. We recommend that you have a separate way of measuring the quantity of water you take for each purpose, if this is not already a condition of your licence.

4 Period of abstraction

Pay careful attention to the periods in which you may abstract. If you hold a licence for spray irrigation and you want to extend your abstraction season, please read the briefing on our website (search for 'lift root crops').

5 Means of Measurement

Most licences state that a meter should be used to measure the quantity of water abstracted. It is important your meter is installed correctly and our staff will look at this when they visit you. Some licences contain a condition requiring you to calibrate your meter. You can find out how to do this, and get other information about metering, on our website (search for 'metering abstractions'). Please remember, if you send your meter away for calibration, make a note of your meter reading before you send it. Also make sure that you make alternative arrangements for measuring your abstraction while your meter is being calibrated.

6 Keeping records

We recommend you keep a diary on-site to record your meter readings. Keep a running tally of the quantity abstracted so that you can see if you're getting close to your maximum allowance. If you think you need to abstract extra water, please contact us early. We cannot guarantee extra water will be available.

You may be required to keep more detailed on-site records than we ask you to send us. We might also ask you to collect other information such as groundwater levels, compensation flows or lake levels. The detailed on-site records help you show our field staff that you've complied with your authorised volumes. The information you send us helps us to monitor abstraction in your area in order to manage resources and protect the environment. If you are a spray irrigator with a two-part tariff

charging agreement, we also use this information to work out your annual charges, and you must keep a record of daily meter readings as part of that agreement.

If you trickle irrigate, which is exempt from licensing control, we strongly recommend that you keep a record of how much water you've abstracted by installing a meter or by recording the pump capacity multiplied by the number of hours it runs. Your records will provide evidence of how much you've used if this purpose becomes licensable.

Some licences state that meter readings must be taken at the same time each day. We encourage you to do this, but it is not essential unless we have told you that we have concerns about your compliance history or there is a local water resource issue.

7 Telling us the quantities of water you have abstracted

If you are a summer abstractor (abstracting between April and October inclusive) we ask you in November each year to submit a record of your abstraction. Otherwise, we ask you in April to submit a record of your abstraction for the preceding 1 April to 31 March period.

Even if you haven't taken any water, you will have to submit a record showing this, known as a 'nil' return.

The table below sets out the records you will need to keep on-site and what you need to send us (returns). This table is based on the volume you are allowed to abstract each day and what you use the water for.

Category of licence	Information to be submitted (returns)	On site meter readings or record of volumes abstracted to be kept
Electricity generation with a consumptive element	Daily totals or meter readings	Daily
Spray irrigators with two- part tariff agreements with daily quantities exceeding 2,500 cubic metres per day.	Weekly totals or meter readings	Daily
Spray irrigators with two- part tariff agreements with daily quantities equal to or less than 2,500 cubic metres per day.	Monthly totals or meter readings	Daily
Other licences with daily quantities exceeding 2,500 cubic metres.	Weekly totals or meter readings	Weekly
Other licences with daily quantities greater than or equal to 100 cubic metres and less than or equal to 2,500 cubic metres.	Monthly totals or meter readings	Weekly
Other licences with daily quantities below 100 cubic metres. Although this category doesn't provide any data, we need meter readings or a record of volumes abstracted for compliance purposes and identifying licences that are not used. Although most licences have a return condition, if necessary, we can ask for returns on an ad hoc basis, using our powers under section 201 Water Resources Act 1991.	We do not ask for any information to be submitted	Monthly

customer service line
03708 506 506

incident hotline
0800 80 70 60

floodline
0845 988 1188

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Licences issued after 1 April 2008 (see the front of your licence for the issue date) should reflect the return requirements in the table above. There may be exceptional cases where we ask for more data, for example, if an abstraction is taking place near an extremely sensitive site. The return requirements will be specified on your licence, and we will discuss any exceptions with you.

If your licence was issued before 1 April 2008, we will ask you to submit your record of actual abstraction as set out in the table above, not necessarily as your licence document says. This will be easier for most licence holders. If it isn't, we will continue to enforce your licence conditions instead.

8 Restrictions on abstraction

Your licence may contain a condition (called a 'hands off flow' condition) that requires you to stop or reduce your abstraction when flows fall below a certain flow. Depending on which part of the country you abstract from, we will either write to you to restrict (and restart) your abstraction or ask you to phone us before you start abstracting.

You may also have a condition in your licence relating to a localised 'prescribed flow'. This may require you to install a structure (such as a "v" notch weir) to ensure that a prescribed flow is maintained immediately downstream of your abstraction. If your licence has such a condition, you must install the structure before you start abstracting and make sure it is installed and maintained in line with your condition or British Standard 3680 Part 4A. Please call us if you have any questions about these conditions, or how to measure the volume of water passing your structure.

9 Aggregated (linked or tied) licences

If you have a number of linked or tied licences, make sure you are familiar with the quantities of water you can abstract from each individual licence, and the total overall. We recommend you use separate meters to record quantities abstracted for each licence.

10 Two-part tariff charging agreement

If you are a spray irrigator with a two-part tariff agreement, you must have a meter, keep a daily record of quantities abstracted and make sure we receive your annual abstraction returns by the specified deadline. If you don't, we will apply the full charge.

11 Water efficiency

We encourage water saving and efficiency. Water is a cost to your business. If you use less, you can save on pumping and wastewater treatment costs. If you can reduce your licensed quantities, you will also save on abstraction charges. For more information on Rainwater Harvesting and Winter Storage Bankside Reservoirs, please contact the us on our customer service line. There are also four 'waterwise' leaflets available to abstractors:

be waterwise: spray irrigators; on golf courses; for farmers; general advice for abstractors

You can download these leaflets from our website. Go to the 'Publications Catalogue' on our website and enter 'be waterwise' under the publications title. This should take you to the guides. For more general advice on saving water, search for water efficiency on our website.

12 Compliance and enforcement

We expect you to meet the requirements of your abstraction licence. If you don't, you could affect the environment or other abstractors.

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We may visit you to help you comply with your licence, and when you submit returns, we will check them. If you'd like to find out more about how we regulate you, including 'enforcement undertakings', a new civil sanction which allows you to tell us if you've breached a condition of your licence, please visit our website or contact our customer service line.

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