



Meath County Council

Information Leaflet

Water Hardness

Drinking water in County Meath is of a very high quality but if you are concerned about whether you have hard water. This leaflet answers the questions most often asked.

What causes hard water?



Water that is hard contains calcium and magnesium compounds. Rain water is naturally soft - it does not contain any minerals, but as it seeps through the ground it can pick up minerals, such as calcium and magnesium compounds, from the soil and rocks it passes through. If rain water passes through soft rocks like chalk or limestone, it picks up these minerals. If it passes through hard rocks, such as granite or through peaty soils, it does not pick up these minerals and so remains soft.

What are the problems with hard water?



Hard water can cause pipes to fur up and scale to collect in kettles and in electric irons and washing machines. If the scale collects on heating elements it can shorten their life and make such appliances less efficient. It is also more difficult to work up a lather from soap, washing up liquid and washing powders. It can also cause "tide marks" on basins, sinks, baths and toilets.

How can I find out if I have hard water ?

You can get detailed information from Meath County Council.

Is there a standard for the hardness of drinking water ?



There is no maximum value for total hardness.

Should I use a water softener ?



This is a matter of personal choice. A softener can improve the efficiency and increase the life of appliances, which use hot water. It can make lathering easier and reduce tide marks on sanitary ware. Some people with skin conditions, such as eczema, can have fewer problems

if they use soft water for washing. However, if you do install a water softener you should make sure that you have a supply of unsoftened water for drinking and cooking.

This is because:

- there is evidence of less heart disease in hard water areas than in soft water areas.
- many water softeners work by replacing the hardness with sodium (salt). Too much sodium can be a problem for premature babies because their kidneys are not good at filtering it out of the blood, and for people who are on a low sodium (low salt) diet
- soft water may release lead from any lead pipes downstream from the softener
- a softener which has not been properly maintained may release bacteria into the water.

If you do decide to have a water softener we advise that you buy it from a reputable supplier. We also advise that you maintain it in accordance with the supplier's instructions.

Magnetic and Electrical conditioning devices

Some of these devices have been shown to be effective in reducing the amount of fur or scale that actually sticks to pipes or heating elements. They do not soften water.

Where can I get more information about drinking water quality?

Your drinking water public record

The Environmental Protection Agency publishes an annual report on drinking water quality in Ireland. This report is based on the ongoing statutory monitoring programme undertaken by local authorities. This can be found at www.epa.ie

Your local authority

Meath County Council has an ongoing statutory monitoring programme for drinking water supplies. For further information please contact:

Environment & Water Services – Drinking Water Services Unit Office – (046) 9067455.