



NEWS RELEASE

Monday January 11, 2010

Waterwatch Scotland comes up trumps as freeze continues

Scotland's water watchdog is a valuable one-stop source of information for concerned consumers facing burst pipe prospect

Gary Womersley, Chief Executive of Waterwatch Scotland (WWS), the independent consumer watchdog for Scotland's water industry, has urged Scottish Water to do more to ensure worried customers have better access to information, especially in events such as the recent prolonged cold spell.

Mr Womersley's call comes as an increasing number of anxious householders turn to Waterwatch Scotland's website and staff for information and advice about frozen, leaking, or burst pipes. Waterwatch Scotland has had customers reporting great difficulty in contacting Scottish Water during this period with recorded messages and calls going unanswered.

"The recent cold snap is virtually unprecedented and does put severe pressure on resources with an extraordinary increase in the number of customer contacts," said Gary Womersley. "While we realise that Scottish Water is doing its utmost to deal with call-outs and to ensure a normal service is maintained, the utility company must also recognise that customers need to know where to look for information too.

"It's all very well to offer emergency contact telephone numbers or details on how to find a plumber in the event of a burst pipe or leakage, but as worried customers appear unable to find the information they need on Scottish Water's website or obtain it from Scottish Water customer service advisers, they naturally turn to us as the sole authoritative information source. Information needs to be accessed easily and quickly."

The value and quality of WWS' service was illustrated recently when it was identified by an influential DIY column in a major national daily as the first – and only – point of call for customers seeking information on free water pipes repair.

Gary Womersley said: "I am delighted that WWS is in a position to provide the sort of information and advice consumers need, particularly in these difficult times. WWS seeks to provide as robust and comprehensive a service as possible and we are happy to see this recognised.

“Three weeks of sub-zero temperatures has had rather a severe impact, especially on Scotland’s elderly, infirm and low-income earners and it is vital that such vulnerable groups can access the assistance and information they require. WWS will continue to work to ensure the needs of all Scotland’s water customers remains a priority.”

WWS will continue to work with Scottish Water to ensure its pipe repair policy benefits customers as much as possible.

For further information, please go to www.waterwatchscotland.org and type in ‘reducing-leakage.pdf’ in the search box available.

Notes to Editors

For an interview with Waterwatch Scotland, please contact Andrew Ritchie on 0131 556 0050 (including out of hours)

Waterwatch Scotland (WWS) is the national complaints handling authority for all domestic and non-domestic water customers and customer representative body for the water industry in Scotland.

WWS is independent of Scottish Water, government and other water/sewerage service providers. Its role is to:

- Investigate Complaints
- Represent Customers’ Views & Interests
- Influence Policy
- Inform & Advise

WWS’ responsibility for second-tier complaints handling means that WWS can take forward individual customer grievances against Scottish Water or other providers.

WWS can also make statutory recommendations to Scottish Ministers, Scottish Water and other service providers, and industry regulators: Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Drinking Water Quality Regulator (DWQR) and the Water Industry Commission for Scotland (WICS).

From time to time, WWS receives complaints which are of such importance or have a public-interest impact beyond the specific complaint itself, that WWS will issue a formal report on the complaint and greater issues raised.

In addition to the making of such formal reports and the findings and recommendations made, a key role of WWS is to continue to work to ensure that such recommendations are adopted in the interest of customers to mitigate and prevent future occurrences.

Issued on behalf of Waterwatch Scotland, Corporate Office, Forrester Lodge, Inglewood, Alloa, FK10 2HU