

POLICY POSITION – Use of Potable Water Pipes for Routing of Broadband Cable



Water UK consider that water companies should not allow the introduction of broadband fibre optic cabling into potable water systems either in the water mains in the highway or in service pipes connecting water mains to properties.

Under Section 174 of the WIA 1991 (as amended) (and equivalents in NI and Scotland¹) installers of these systems need to obtain formal consent from the water provider to access the potable water network, even for operations solely on pipes under customer ownership.

There are potential risks to public health associated with the introduction of any material into the potable water distribution system. These include:

- the risks of contamination of drinking water;
- hampering of repairs to address leakage or damage;
- reduction in service due to introduction of restrictions in small diameter pipes;
- the ability of materials used for cabling to withstand rigorous mains cleaning processes;
- disruption to sediments within older pipes that may cause localised discolouration and;
- the general public acceptability of such systems which involve the introduction of “foreign materials” into the network.

We accept the materials used may have appropriate certification under Water Supply (Water Quality) 2000 regulations and / or Water Supply (Water Fittings) 1999 regulations (and equivalents in NI and Scotland). However these approvals assess the safety of the product in contact with water rather than the practicalities of installation or the acceptability to consumers.

Whilst the use of live potable water pipes as routes for broadband cable is not acceptable there may be limited options to utilise abandoned, redundant or non-potable water mains within the network. It should be acknowledged however that these mains may be limited in their location or connectivity.

Water UK recommend that this policy position is reconsidered should research or practical experience provide evidence that these concerns have been addressed.

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¹ The Water and Sewerage Service (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 / Water (Scotland) Act 1980, Schedule 4, part VII