

The Human Right to Water

It is an offence under Section 16 of the Private Water Supply (PWS) Regulations, The Water Intended for Human Consumption (Private Supplies) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 (legislation.gov.uk) for someone to take an action that results in the deterioration of a PWS.”

And

In 2002, the United Nations officially adopted water as a human right. **General Comment 15, of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states the following:** “The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses.” This means that the 145 countries who have endorsed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights have to ensure fair and equal access to safe drinking water.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN IF WATER IS A HUMAN RIGHT?

The right to water has several dimensions. The quantity of water must be, at a minimum, sufficient to meet basic needs, in terms of drinking, bathing, cleaning, cooking and sanitation. For more information about water quantity and consumption, see the [Water Consumption fact sheet](#).

The quality of the water must be safe and free from contamination. Though the quality of water can vary with its use (for example, drinking, sanitation and agriculture require different qualities), water should never contain anything that could pose a health threat.

The third aspect of the right to water is accessibility. Water must be physically accessible, meaning that water facilities must be within the house or in close proximity of the house. If a person must walk for hours to get water, then they are not enjoying their right to water. Water must also be economically accessible, meaning that fees should not be so high that people must either drink contaminated water, or sacrifice other basic human rights to be able to afford safe drinking water. Lastly, water must be accessible for all people, including the most vulnerable and marginalized people. The government is obliged to ensure that people can enjoy their basic human rights. There are three levels of obligation. First, the government must respect the right, and not do anything to interfere with the right. In the case of drinking water, this means that the government cannot deny anyone access to safe drinking water. The second level of the government’s duty is to protect the right, by preventing third party interference. For drinking water, this may involve the establishment of legislation that prohibits manufacturing companies from polluting drinking water. The third level of obligation is to fulfill the right, when necessary. In the case of drinking water, this may require the government to establish a water treatment plant or construct wells to provide safe drinking water.