

# 5 TIPS FOR USE OF WATER AS A COMMON RESOURCE

A BRIEF GUIDE ON THE INTEGRATED WATER SERVICE



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*This short guide is part of our information and awareness campaign part of the project "Consumatori in rete: diamo forza ai nostri diritti" - Consumers in the web: let's make our rights stronger - carried out together with the Ministry for Economic Development and three other Consumers Associations.*

*The main objective of the project is to promote and facilitate assistance and consultancy services, the upholding of consumers' rights and the knowledge of opportunities and tools for the protection of citizens' rights through information campaigns.*

## INTRODUCTION

### CITTADINANZATTIVA AND THE INTEGRATED WATER SERVICE

Cittadinanzattiva has been promoting for several years now policy initiatives, information and awareness campaigns with the aim to favour a new approach by users to local public services: **a role which includes the full involvement of citizens in the definition, accessibility, quality and care of services.**

The aim of this guide is to inform people on how to actively participate in asserting their rights and which protection tools to use to enforce them, since for us **acting as a citizen is the best way to be one!**

### THE INTEGRATED WATER SERVICE

The **Integrated Water Service** (SII) covers all the public services of collection, transportation and distribution of water for civil use, sewerage and waste water treatment. From a regulatory point of view, the main reference is Legislative Decree 152 of 3 April 2006 "Environmental Regulations", which redefines the service and requires that its management follow the principles of efficiency, effectiveness and economy in compliance with both National and Community rules.

### THE PRINCIPLES

Nell'erogazione del servizio idrico integrato, l'azienda incaricata deve seguire i principi fondamentali di:

- *equality and impartiality* – there must be no discrimination on grounds of sex, race, language, religion and political opinion. Particular attention should be paid to the disabled, the elderly and those belonging to vulnerable social groups;
- *continuity* - the service must be provided on an ongoing and regular basis, avoiding any disruption or cutting down its supply;
- *participation* - user participation in the service must be guaranteed in order to protect the right to a correct supply and foster collaboration;

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- *efficiency and effectiveness* - the service provider must ensure, by adopting the most appropriate measures, both effectiveness and efficiency;
- *courtesy* - the service provider should always respect users and be courteous in its relationship with them;
- *clarity and comprehensibility of messages* - operators must use plain language when dealing with users.

### Did you know that ...

... since the Neolithic times and up to the 1800s the spread of epidemics and pandemics has always been linked to poor hygienic conditions in which people used to live because of the difficulties in disposing of waste water. The liquid waste was poured into the canals dug in the middle of the streets or at their sides which were mostly open air sewerage systems. Only rarely sections of pipelines were laid underground, such as the Roman sewers. The most important example is the Cloaca Maxima built during the reign of one of the first kings of Rome and officialised during the reign of Tarquinius Priscus in the sixth century BC.

## (1) LEARN ABOUT WATER, A COMMON RESOURCE

*Never forget that water is the source of life and, as such, is everybody's heritage and everybody's right!*

### WATER – A COMMON RESOURCE

Water is a common good, essential for life. The effects of climate change, pollution and waste make it an increasingly limited resource and the cause of serious social tensions, especially in underdeveloped countries.

Also in Italy the proper management of this resource has several critical aspects which affect us all up close, more than other public services, since water is one of the basic needs for humans and is indispensable as a vital asset. Therefore, the issue of water management, part of the larger project of reform of local public services, has aroused great interest in civil society which went to the polls in June 2011 to rule against two aspects, repealed as a result of the referendum, related to the management of this common resource: 1) the return on invested capital through the tariffs; 2) entrusting the management of the service to private or mixed companies.

Access to drinking water, healthy and clean is a fundamental human right and one of the main determiners of human health.

### DRINKING WATER

The tap water in our homes is a controlled, safe and affordable resource which must meet certain requirements (quality parameters) defined by law in order to be labelled as drinking water. Drinking water must not contain microorganisms and parasites, or other substances in quantities which may be hazardous to human health. Also, it must not exceed certain maximum values of substances considered not properly harmful to health.

In order to be considered drinkable water must meet the requirements of 62 chemical, physical and bacteriological parameters.

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### MAIN PARAMETERS OF WATER QUALITY

<i>parameter</i>	<i>description</i>	<i>legal limit</i>
<b>Arsenic</b>	It is a semi-metal, geological in origin or man-made, used in weed killers. It is also used in the glass, dye, paper and wood industries.	0,01 mg/l
<b>Boron</b>	Boron often ends up in the soil and in the water through badly insulated domestic landfills.	1 mg/l
<b>Chlorites</b>	Are by-products which form when using chlorine dioxide for the disinfection of water.	0,2 mg/l
<b>Chlorides</b>	High or low variable quantities of chlorides indicate water contamination. High values give a salty taste to the water.	250 mg/l
<b>Fluorine</b>	This can be found in any type of food in relatively small quantities. If fluoride is absorbed too frequently it can cause tooth decay, osteoporosis and harm the kidneys, bones, nerves and muscles.	1,5 mg/l
<b>Nickel</b>	This metal can cause allergies and is classified as a possible carcinogen.	0,01 mg/l
<b>Nitrates</b>	The presence of nitrates in drinking water is only partly natural. In most cases it depends on human activities (livestock, fertilizers, etc.).	50 mg/l
<b>Selenium</b>	In areas close to hazardous waste disposal areas selenium ends up in surface waters or ground waters through irrigation. This phenomenon causes selenium to infiltrate in local drinking water.	0,01 mg/l
<b>Sulphates</b>	High concentrations in the water we drink can have a laxative effect when combined with calcium and magnesium.	250 mg/l

Source: [www.cittadinanzattiva.it](http://www.cittadinanzattiva.it)

➔ **Do you wish to check the quality of the water that runs through your tap?**

Visit the website of your water provider and check out the main parameters of reference.

! Your water service provider is required to supply information on the quality of the water.

**Box**

***Water and Health***

Water is a basic nutrient of the human body, is critical to human life and is present on Earth in great quantities. It is essential for the performance of all the physiological processes and biochemical reactions in our body.

In adults water accounts for about 60% of body weight, while in younger people the figure is closer to 80%.

Our body maintains its "water balance" through two mechanisms: thirst, which allows us to adjust the intake of water, and water re-absorption in the kidneys, which regulates the amount of water excreted in the urine.



## (2) REDUCE YOUR WATER FOOTPRINT

*Do not use more water than necessary and be careful of what you buy!*

### WATER FOOTPRINT

The water consumption of each of us depends not only on its use (wash, drink, cook, etc ...), but also on our general choices of consumption. Therefore the concept of water footprint can be applied to both products and people.

The **Water footprint** of a product is the total quantity of fresh water used for its production and for its consumption. To calculate it one must consider the volume of water used during the whole life cycle of the product.

! Usually the quantity of water used for the manufacturing of goods is far higher than the consumption of water related to the use of such goods, since it includes processes which require a considerable supply of water, such as crop irrigation.

**Example.** When you buy a bag of potatoes at a local shop you should consider both the amount of water used for processing, washing and boiling the potatoes (direct use) and all the water used in the supply chain to produce them (indirect use).

The **individual water footprint** is the sum of the water footprints of all the goods and services we consume.



### Did you know that ...

... **a slice of bread** on your table requires **48 liters** of water? In addition to being used as an ingredient in the preparation, most of the water is used in the cultivation of wheat. The best way to minimize the water footprint of bread is not to waste it;

... when you eat a **slice of cheese** you “consume” **152 liters** of water? Dairy products require a significant amount of water in each stage of the process, from the cultivation of fodder for the cattle to the transformation of the cheese itself. In order to reduce your water footprint try to eat cheese in a balanced diet and not waste it;

... **a T-shirt** requires **2,495 liters** of water? The production of cotton has a significant impact on water depletion. You can reduce your water footprint by simply buying fewer T-shirts and thinking before you throw them away because they are no longer fashionable;

... the production of **a sheet of paper** requires **13 liters** of water? Try always to buy recycled paper, identifiable by the FSC logo or the eco-label (ecolabel); use both sides of the paper and think twice before printing documents.

(Source: “Guida al consumo dell’acqua Awake”, European Commission)



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### TEN RULES TO AVOID WASTE

Each Italian, on average, consumes more than 175 liters of water a day. Although this quantity has been decreasing in recent years, it is still higher than that of other European countries. Therefore, it is everyone's duty to change one's daily habits through small anti-waste measures. Here are some tips to follow:

- 1) **close** the tap while brushing your teeth, washing your hands or shaving;
- 2) **opt** for a shower instead of a bath;
- 3) **install** mixer taps;
- 4) **install** a flushing system on the toilet so you can adjust the water flow (a box with a double button or a regulator)
- 5) **use** a bucket to wash your car;
- 6) **use** a bowl when you wash your fruit and vegetables. Fill a bowl with water and then reuse it instead of throwing it away, for example, to water the plants;
- 7) **use** your appliances such as the washing machine and the dishwasher only at full load;
- 8) if you don't have a dishwasher, **use** the cooking water to wash the dishes - as well as saving water it gives excellent results;
- 9) every now and then **check** the water meter. If it continues to run when the taps are closed the system should be checked;
- 10) **choose** carefully what to eat and what to wear, taking into account the water footprint of each product.

! If you wish to calculate your water footprint consider that the water you use directly every day is equivalent to only a small percentage (about 4%) of your total water footprint. So, in addition to trying to **waste as little as possible** following our 10 Tips, it is also important to **consume responsibly**, gathering information on the origin of the products you buy (for example, you may decide to consume the same amount of a given product knowing that it comes from a region with less problems of water availability).

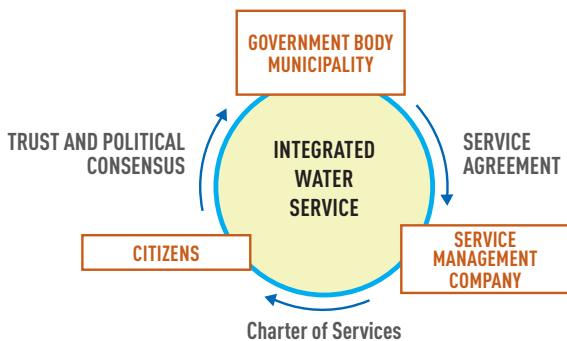
### (3) BE INFORMED AND PARTICIPATE

*Be informed on how the integrated water service is managed and on the methods provided and how you can contribute to their improvement*

#### GET TO KNOW THE INTEGRATED WATER SERVICE

To know in detail how the integrated water service is run in your city consult the **Charter of Services**. You can find it on the website of the company which takes care of the service, or at its offices. The Charter is the document in which the company undertakes to guarantee the improvement of the quality of services as per **Service Agreement**. The Charter also shows the indicators of quality of services provided, so as to enable citizens to verify the correspondence between the level of service stated and the real output, and the forms of protection available.

**This picture shows the relationship among the parties involved**



If you wish to know more, you can also read the **Guidelines for the Integrated Water Service** adopted by your municipality. Inside you will find useful information on how the service is organized.

### Box

#### The powers of public authorities in the field of the Integrated water service (according to Legislative Decree 152/2006)

The **Region** defines the best local area and identifies the governing bodies.

The **municipalities** must work alongside the governing bodies. In fact, the local authorities, through the appropriate governmental agency, organize the water service, its management, its tariffs, custody and management and control.

The **local territory** is the region but, for efficiency reasons, the latter can divide it into sub-areas, corresponding at least to the Provinces or to the metropolitan cities. In every area there is a single operator entrusted with the service.

The relationship between the service provider and the appropriate governmental agency is regulated by an **agreement** drawn up by the latter, based on the conventions adopted by the Authority for electricity, gas and water.

### CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION

→ **Citizens participate in the definition and assessment of the quality of integrated water management services.**

The 2008 Budget, Article 2, **paragraph 461**, introduces a number of provisions for the protection of consumers' rights in the field of local public services, and therefore also water management services. The most significant new feature is the involvement of consumer associations and the general public in determining and monitoring the standard of operation of the services. Basically, the rule binds the service provider to adopt the Charter of quality of services prepared and advertised in accordance with business and consumer associations.

### What can you do?

- know the regulation;
- push your local administration for action;
- contact the local offices of Cittadinanzattiva (or other organizations for the protection of consumers' rights and take part actively in the local assembly)

#### → **Actively interact with the service provider**

The Charter of services lists all contacts (call centres, websites, information offices, etc...). Use these contacts to offer your suggestions and contributions in order to improve the service in your community.

#### → **Learn about public activities and encourage the participation of your Local Authorities**

Since 1992, on the 22 March of each year we celebrate the World Water Day. It is an initiative established by the United Nations in order to stress the importance of this resource. Celebrating this event is also an opportunity to raise awareness within organizations, institutions and citizens on the importance of a proper local management of water services.

#### → **Actively participate in the discussion on the subject of water as a common resource**

There is a vast popular movement on water and there is a great deal of attention by individual citizens. Be informed about the committees and participate in your neighbourhood offering your contribution to the discussions. There is an **Italian Forum of Water Movements** which brings together local committees, social organizations, unions, associations and individuals.

### (4) BE INFORMED BEFORE PAYING

*Learn about the tariff on water and what you end up paying*

#### What I pay

Citizens pay the full cost for the management of integrated water services, i.e. all those services that allow you to have drinking water at home and correctly dispose of the dirty water.

The services listed in the water bill are:

1. the supply of drinking water (**aqueduct service**), drawing the water from the natural environment, including the environmental protection of the areas from which water is drawn; its treatment, in order to make it drinkable; the distribution network in the different stages of transport (large pipes), storage, distribution through the road network, delivery to homes (connection) and the meter;
2. the **sewerage service**, users can dispose of the water used at home in a specific road pipeline which will take it to a treatment plant;
3. the **purification** service, which consists in the treatment of waste water transported from the sewer, before its release in the natural environment (rivers, seas, lakes) so as to minimize the pollution of these waters;
4. **taxes**. The water service is subject to 10% VAT.

#### How do I calculate how much I have to pay?

The rate applied to each of these three services includes:

- a **fixed** amount, which is payable regardless of the water consumed. This fixed part cannot be subdivided and is calculated in Euro/year. This amount covers the rent of the metre and part of the investment costs;
- a **variable** amount proportional to consumption. This amount regards the water main and is divided into consumption brackets (facilitated, base and 1 to 3 tariff levels which are designed to penalise the higher use by attributing to users the higher environmental costs caused by consumption over the basic quantity).

The variable part regarding sewerage and water treatment is proportional to consumption but is not divided into brackets.

! In order to avoid unpleasant surprises make sure the meter is read periodically by an employee of the provider. In the Service Charter you can find the list of readings per year that the provider agrees to make. Or check if you can read the meter periodically yourself.

**New.** At the end of 2012, the Authority for electricity, gas and water introduced a new set of tariffs in order to define a method to be used throughout Italy for the calculation of water tariffs. This new method provides for the introduction of **environmental costs** among the general costs and **anti-waste tariff mechanisms** (more water is consumed, the higher the rate).



## (5) BE PROTECTED IN CASE OF BAD SERVICE

*If you are not satisfied with the service provided in your area show your dissatisfaction in your complaint!*

### → How to forward a complaint

The Charter of the water service outlines the quality standards the provider agrees to comply with and the forms of user protection, such as how to make a complaint and obtain refunds in case of bad service.

### → Contact the agencies for the quality of local public services

These agencies have already been set up in some cities such as Genoa, Grosseto, Rome and Turin. Citizens can contact them in order to improve the efficiency and quality of local public services.

### → Contact Consumers' Associations

To give more strength to your recommendations contact the Consumers' Associations.

**Cittadinanzattiva** is one of them, recognized since 2000 by the National Council of Consumers and Users, established at the Ministry of Economic Development.

To learn more visit our website:

[www.cittadinanzattiva.it](http://www.cittadinanzattiva.it)

### → Contact the Authority for electricity, gas and water

You can also submit your complaint to the Authority, after having forwarded it to the provider who is required to respond within the time limits set by the Charter of services.





**New.** In 2011, with the decree "Salva-Italia", the Authority for Electricity and Gas now has the "functions related to the regulation and control of water services" previously entrusted to the National Agency for the regulation and the supervision of water. These functions refer to several aspects of integrated water services: from the definition of eligible costs and the criteria for determining the rates to cover these costs, skills in terms of quality of service, verification of area planning and preparation of standard agreements for the assignment of the service.

## **Do you want to receive information, report an unsatisfactory service or forward a complaint?**

Contact the nearest agency of Cittadinanzattiva by writing to the offices of:

Bologna	<i>segreteria@cittadinanzattiva-er.it</i>
Cagliari	<i>cittadinanzattivaca@tiscali.it</i>
Catania	<i>pit.catania@yahoo.it</i>
Chiaravalle	<i>cittadinanzattiva_ancona@yahoo.it</i>
Chiavari	<i>cittadinanzattivaliguria@yahoo.it</i>
Latina	<i>cittadinanzattivalt@libero.it</i>
Milano	<i>consumatori@cittadinanzattivalombardia.com</i>
Perugia	<i>perugia@cittadinanzattiva.umbria.it</i>
Riva del Garda	<i>info@cittadinanzattivadeltrentino.it</i>
Roma	<i>pitroma.ca@gmail.com</i>
Spoletto	<i>cittattiv.umbria@libero.it</i>
Torino	<i>pit.torino@cittadinanzattiva.it</i>
Urbino	<i>urbino@cittadinanzattiva.it</i>

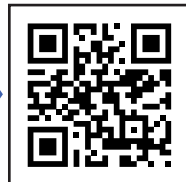
The National head office can be contacted at: [pit.servizi@cittadinanzattiva.it](mailto:pit.servizi@cittadinanzattiva.it)

## **Do you want to learn more about Cittadinanzattiva, participate in its activities organized in your area, or join our Movement?**

Visit **[www.cittadinanzattiva.it](http://www.cittadinanzattiva.it)** look for the assembly closest to you ... and good participation!



WATCH THE VIDEO 5 TIPS FOR USE  
OF WATER AS A COMMON RESOURCE



*Ministero  
dello Sviluppo Economico*

Spesa finanziata dal Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico  
ai sensi del Decreto 21 marzo 2013