

Notes to Owners/Occupants
Procedures for Investigating Water Seepage in Private Buildings
Joint Office of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
and the Buildings Department

Responsibilities of Owners and Occupants

1. Water seepage in buildings is generally caused by defective building fabric or installations and lack of proper maintenance. Proper management, maintenance and repair of buildings, including resolving water seepage problems, are the responsibilities of building owners and occupants. The co-operation of owners and occupants concerned is essential for resolving water seepage problems. In general, if water seepage occurs in private buildings, owners should first arrange their own investigation into the cause of seepage and, as appropriate, co-ordinate with the occupants and other owners concerned for repair works.
2. Under normal circumstances, seepage originated from penetration of rainwater through roofs, flat roofs, balconies, external walls or windows of a building or from leaking water pipes will not cause any public health implications and is not nuisance actionable by the Joint Office (JO) under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) (PHMSO).

Objective of the Joint Office

3. The objective of JO is to identify the source of seepage by means of systematic investigation through the powers conferred by the PHMSO and the professional expertise of the relevant government departments, as well as the co-operation of the owners and occupants, with a view to requiring the owners concerned to carry out repair in order to abate the nuisance arising from water seepage actionable under the PHMSO.
4. Reinstatement or repair of the affected areas or locations will not be undertaken by JO. Owners may make reference to the information on water seepage investigation and repair works publicised by JO to address the seepage.

Standard Investigation and Handling Procedures

5. Within 6 working days upon receipt of a water seepage report, JO staff will contact the informant to arrange an inspection of the affected premises. The informant should assist JO staff in arranging access to the affected areas or locations, and remove any obstruction (e.g. false ceiling, personal belongings, etc.) that tends to conceal the seepage location in order to facilitate investigation.
6. In general, if JO staff visit the suspected premises and are unable to gain entry, a Notice of Intended Entry will be issued to arrange a follow-up investigation, specifying the date of the

next visit. The owner or occupant of the suspected premises is requested to co-operate. Failure to comply with the requirements of the Notice of Intended Entry without reasonable excuse will result in prosecution. In the case that access to the suspected premises for investigation is denied, JO may apply for a warrant to effect entry into premises from the Court in order to proceed with the investigation and tests.

7. Where necessary, the person concerned may consider consulting building professionals/building contractors on the proper ways of carrying out the repair works. To facilitate compliance with the requirements of the “Nuisance Notice”, the person concerned may also contact JO for enquiries or request a copy of the water seepage investigation report.
8. If the seepage becomes mild or improves significantly during the investigation, or the source of seepage cannot be identified through investigation, JO will cease the investigation. If there is no substantive evidence to prove any contravention of the provisions of the PHMSO, JO will have no legal basis to take any enforcement action.
9. If building/drainage pipe defects or wastage of water¹ caused by defective water supply pipes is found during the investigation, JO will refer the case to the Buildings Department (BD) or the Water Supplies Department (WSD) for follow-up and enforcement action in accordance with the Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123) or the Waterworks Ordinance (Cap. 102) respectively.

New Procedures for Investigating Water Seepage

10. Starting from 16 July 2026, JO has implemented new procedures for investigating water seepage in private buildings (**the new procedures**) as a pilot scheme. Water seepage cases received by JO on or after the implementation date will be handled in accordance with the new procedures, while cases received before 16 July 2026 will continue to be handled under the existing procedures.
11. Under the new procedures, water seepage investigation by JO will be conducted in stages as follows:

Stage I – Confirmation of Water Seepage Condition (by JO staff)

12. JO staff will visit the informant’s premises to assess the seepage condition and record information on the seepage area by using newly introduced infrared thermography to compare the surface temperature of the testing surface of the seepage area with the nearby dry areas, with the existing use of electronic moisture meters. If the moisture content of the seepage area

¹ WSD will not intervene in a private dispute arising from a mild water seepage nuisance where there is no evidence of wastage of water.

is found equal to or exceeding 35%² and there is reason to believe that the seepage originates from the upper unit, JO will issue a Notification Letter to the owner/ occupier of the upper unit, requiring the owner to carry out inspection and repair works within 28 calendar days.

13. If seepage persists after the period specified in the Notification Letter, JO will conduct Stage II – Initial Investigation and Stage III – Professional Investigation in parallel.

Stage II – Initial Investigation (normally by JO staff)

14. Depending on the circumstances and needs of the case, JO staff will conduct one or several of the following tests:

Test method	Test location	Premises involved	Time required ³
Moisture Content Monitoring ² (using an electronic moisture meter)	Wall surface/ceiling	Informant's premises	About 0.5 hour
Colour Water Test ⁴ (using colour water ⁵)	Drainage outlet	Suspected premises	About 1 hour
Reversible Pressure Test ⁶	Water supply pipe and seepage area	Suspected premises and informant's premises	About 3 to 5 hours

15. Normally, JO staff will visit the premises concerned once or twice for investigation and tests. For complicated cases (e.g. involving several bathrooms or seepage locations), multiple visits to the informant's premises and the suspected premises may be required for investigation, tests, reviews of test results or monitoring of changes in the seepage condition.

² JO will not investigate water seepage reports with a moisture content below 35%. If the moisture content at the seepage area is below 35% during Stage II or III investigation, JO will cease to follow up the water seepage investigation in accordance with the established procedures.

³ The time required for each test may vary depending on site conditions.

⁴ During the test, colour water will be poured into the drainage outlets and the seepage area in the informant's premises will then be reviewed for any seepage of colour water.

⁵ Appropriate precautionary measures will be taken according to site circumstances and needs to avoid spillage of colour water outside the testing areas. In case any person accidentally comes into direct contact with the colour water, general hygiene practices should be observed. Medical attention should be sought as soon as possible in case of discomfort.

⁶ Applicable to suspected leakage from water supply pipes and continuous water dripping in the seepage area. Before the test, the rate of water dripping or moisture content will be recorded. Then, the water supply mains at the suspected premises will be turned off and all taps in the premises will be turned on to drain off the water and release the pressure inside the pipes. The change in the rate of water dripping or moisture content will be recorded afterwards. The water supply mains at the suspected premises will then be turned on and all taps in the premises will be turned off to resume the pressure inside the pipes. The change in the rate of water dripping or moisture content will then be recorded again.

Stage III – Professional Investigation (normally by JO’s consultants)

16. Depending on the circumstances and needs of the case, JO’s consultants will conduct one or several of the following tests⁷:

Test method	Test location	Premises involved	Time required ⁸
Moisture Content Monitoring ² (using an electronic moisture meter)	Wall surface/ceiling	Informant’s premises	About 0.5 hour
Microwave Tomography ⁹	Seepage area (normally for ceiling)	Informant’s premises	About 2 to 4 hours
Ponding Test for Floor ¹⁰ (using colour water ¹¹)	Floor slab of bathroom/shower compartment/kitchen	Suspected premises	About 1 to 2 hours
Spray Test for Wall ¹² (using colour water ¹¹)	Wall surface of bath tub/shower tray/shower compartment	Suspected premises	About 15 minutes
Reversible Pressure Test ⁶ (if not carried out in Stage II)	Water supply pipe and seepage area	Suspected premises and informant’s premises	About 3 to 5 hours

17. Normally, JO’s consultants will visit the premises concerned once or twice for investigation and tests during Stage III – Professional Investigation¹³. For complicated cases (e.g. involving several bathrooms or seepage locations), multiple visits to the informant’s premises and the suspected premises may be required for investigation, tests, reviews of test results and monitoring of changes in the seepage condition.

⁷ For a demonstration of the test methods, please refer to the promotional video “Effective Ways for Water Seepage Investigation (調查滲水有辦法)” in paragraph 28. Under normal circumstances, if microwave tomography has already been conducted, no further ponding test and spraying test would be conducted and vice versa.

⁸ The time required for each test may vary depending on site conditions.

⁹ Microwave Tomography cannot be effectively applied under the certain circumstances. For example, the seepage area is small; the seepage area with concrete spalling or other obstructions, such as drainage pipes and false ceiling; the seepage area with tile finishes; there is no water supply point above the seepage area; the seepage area is mainly at a wall or beam side/soffit; the seepage area is close to a pipe duct or inside a pipe duct; cases with multiple suspected premises; no record of slab thickness for the premises concerned.

¹⁰ The drainage outlet will be plugged before the test. The test area will be flooded with colour water and cleaned with clear water after the test. Upon completion of the test, the seepage area in the informant’s premises will be reviewed for any seepage of colour water.

¹¹ Appropriate precautionary measures will be taken according to site circumstances and needs to avoid spillage of colour water outside the testing areas. In case, any person accidentally comes into direct contact with the colour water, general hygiene practices should be observed. Medical attention should be sought as soon as possible in case of discomfort.

¹² Colour water will be sprayed on the walls of bath tubs, shower trays or shower compartments. Upon completion of the test, the seepage area in the informant’s premises will be reviewed for any seepage of colour water.

¹³ If the site circumstances are suitable for using microwave moisture sensing devices, generally only one visit to the premises concerned is required for investigation and tests. However, if the site circumstances are not suitable for using microwave moisture sensing devices, conventional testing methods such as ponding test and spray test need to be applied. If there is suspicion of leakage in the water supply pipe, a reversible pressure test will be conducted. In such cases, JO’s consultants may need to make multiple visits to the informant’s premises and the suspected premises for investigation and tests.

18. Before the visit, JO will issue a letter to inform the occupants of the premises concerned of the appointment of the consultant, the names and contact telephone numbers of the staff of JO and the consultant, enclosed with a sample of the consultant's staff card issued by JO. When visiting the premises concerned for investigation, the consultant's staff should bring along their staff cards for identification and verification by the public. Members of the public may also contact JO and the consultant to verify the identity of the consultant's staff. Names and contact telephone numbers of consultants employed by JO for water seepage investigation can be downloaded from the website below:

https://www.bd.gov.hk/doc/en/resources/faq/Water_Seepage_Problem_Consultants_List_e.pdf



19. If the source of seepage causing public health nuisance is identified during the investigation, a "Nuisance Notice" under the PHMSO will be issued to the person concerned requiring the abatement of the nuisance within a specified period. The JO will check the compliance upon expiry of the period as well as a confirmatory test as necessary; instigate prosecution based on evidence for cases of non-compliance and further apply to the court for a "Nuisance Order". In addition, the JO will also recover examination fees from upper floor unit that failed to fulfill their responsibilities for such cases.

Request for Copy of Water Seepage Investigation Report

20. Owners / occupants concerned who wish to obtain a copy of the water seepage investigation report may submit a request to JO under the Code on Access to Information. Applicants may complete and return the application form to JO by mail or facsimile.

For the application procedures/application form, please refer to the thematic webpage on water seepage below:

https://www.waterseepage.gov.hk/en/information/investigation_report.html



The office hours, addresses, e-mail addresses, contact numbers and facsimile numbers of the 4 regional JOs are available on the thematic webpage on water seepage below:

https://www.waterseepage.gov.hk/en/about_us/joint_office.html



Handling water seepage problem by Owners

21. Water seepage in private premises is primarily a matter of building management and maintenance, for which property owners and occupants are responsible. There are experienced building professionals/consultant firms/contractors that may provide assistance in investigating and rectifying water seepage problems. Please refer to the webpage below for the Lists of Professional Practitioners, Consultant Firms and Contractors:

https://www.waterseepage.gov.hk/en/professional/list_professional_firm.html

(Note: For the “Important Note” and “Disclaimer” regarding the use of the lists, please refer to the information provided via the webpage link above.)



22. If water seepage problems involve the water supply system, owners may engage a plumber licensed under the Waterworks Regulations (Cap. 102A) to inspect the system and carry out the necessary repair works. Please refer to the webpage below for the List of Licensed Plumbers:

<https://www.wsd.gov.hk/en/plumbing-engineering/licensed-plumbers/index.html>

(Note: For the “Important Note” and “Disclaimer” regarding the use of the list, please refer to the information provided via the webpage link above.)



23. If necessary, owners may consider consulting a lawyer for legal advice or resolving water seepage disputes through co-ordination and mediation. For information, please refer to the webpage below:

<https://www.hklawsoc.org.hk/en/Serve-the-Public/Everyday-Life-Legal-Issues/Law-Society-Leaflets>



24. The Pro-bono Online Mediation Scheme for Water Seepage Disputes (the Scheme) is a collaborative initiative operated by the Agency for Volunteer Service and eBRAM International Online Dispute Resolution Centre Limited free of charge. The Scheme aims to foster a harmonious community by offering free pro-bono online mediation services to property owners and occupants encountering disputes arising from water seepage issues, facilitating effective and timely dispute resolution. For information, please refer to the webpage below:

https://www.ebram.org/Water_Seepage_POM_Scheme/?language=en



25. Moreover, owners or occupants may also consider seeking assistance from the Building Affairs Expert Determination Centre. For information, please refer to the webpage below:

https://www.hkis.org.hk/en/division_bsd.html?id=196



26. Owners or occupants concerned who wish to know more about handling water seepage issues through mediation may also consider approaching the Hong Kong International Arbitration Centre (Tel: 2525 2381) for assistance.

Financial Assistance Schemes

27. The Integrated Building Rehabilitation Assistance Scheme (IBRAS) is a one-stop service coordinated by the Urban Renewal Authority, providing financial assistance and technical support to building owners. The Building Maintenance Grant Scheme for Needy Owners under IBRAS is applicable to water seepage related repair works, while the Building Safety Loan Scheme is applicable to water seepage related inspection, testing and repair works. Eligible persons in need may apply for a loan or subsidy for handling water seepage issues, including carrying out inspection and testing procedures and the related repair works. For details, please refer to the webpages below:

- 1) “The Building Maintenance Grant Scheme for Needy Owners” webpage

<https://brplatform.org.hk/en/subsidy-and-assistance/integrated-building-rehabilitation-assistance-scheme>



- 2) “The Building Safety Loan Scheme” webpage

<https://www.bd.gov.hk/en/safety-inspection/financial-assistance/pilot-scheme-water-seepage/index.html>



Public Information

28. JO produces promotional videos and pamphlets from time to time to enhance the public’s knowledge of how to handle water seepage in buildings. For information, please refer to the webpage below:

https://www.waterseepage.gov.hk/en/information/video_corner.html

- 1) Promotional video: “Effective Ways for Water Seepage Investigation”

https://www.waterseepage.gov.hk/tc/information/files/video_10.mp4



2) Pamphlets: “Layman’s Guide on Handling Water Seepage”

https://www.waterseepage.gov.hk/filemanager/content/pdf/en/Layman_guide.pdf



3) “The Building Maintenance Guidebook” website : Please refer to section 4.1.3 for reinstatement or repair for the areas or locations affected by water seepage

<https://www.bd.gov.hk/en/resources/codes-and-references/codes-and-design-manuals/bmg.html>



29. The Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors has issued “A Guide for the Public: Tackling Water Seepage in Buildings”, which includes a practical toolkit for water seepage inspection, testing and repair. The guide provides information on identifying signs of seepage, simple testing methods and useful repair advice. For information, please refer to the webpage below:

https://www.hkis.org.hk/en/division_bsd.html?id=243



Thematic Webpage on Water Seepage

30. JO has set up a one-stop thematic webpage on water seepage to facilitate the public to obtain information on water seepage and related issues. For details, please refer to the webpage below:

<https://www.waterseepage.gov.hk/en/home/index.html>



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