



FACT SHEET

Highway drainage

The county's highway drainage systems are maintained by Cormac in accordance with the Highway Maintenance Manual, on behalf of Cornwall Council.

What is highway drainage?

Highway drainage involves removing or controlling water away from the road surface and the ground beneath (known as subgrade). The constant presence of water on the road surface can weaken it causing potholes and ruts; in the same way, the presence of water in the subgrade can reduce its ability to support heavy traffic loads.

There are a number of ways to drain roads, but gullies are the most common. In Cornwall we have at least 93,500 gullies across the highway network which are routinely cleaned by a mechanical emptying machine.

Why do we need highway drainage?

Highway drainage systems **are** designed to:

- Remove highway surface water from the road to maintain road safety, minimise nuisance and prevent damage to the structural integrity of the highway
- Minimise the impact of highway surface water on the surrounding environment

Highway drainage systems **are not** designed to:

- Remove surface water from adjacent land or properties
- Provide an overflow system for land drains, watercourses, rivers or sewers.

How often do we clean highway drainage?

We carry out planned and reactive maintenance not just to highway drains, but also to leats and other waterways.

Planned highway drainage maintenance takes the form of regular scheduled visits to carry out operations such as gully emptying, ditch clearance and maintenance of grips (a hole or pipe that carries water through a hedge, wall or bank), and boltholes (a ditch across the verge which drains water into a back ditch). When we do this we aim to combine activities with other works to minimise any disruption.

We empty gullies at frequencies varying from three months to two years depending on the location of the gully and the importance of the road.

Where persistent problems are identified with gullies being blocked by silt and detritus on a regular basis, these are programmed for a greater cleaning frequency.

We deal with ditches, grips and boltholes as part of our regular cyclic maintenance of the rural network.

We also maintain other drainage assets, including leats, soakaways, ponds and culverts.

An important part of our role is to carry out proactive works and inspect and treat flooding "hot spots" when we receive a forecast of very heavy rain. Drainage gullies and drains can become blocked very quickly when materials like mud or stones are carried on to roads during heavy rain or flooding. This can also happen quite frequently throughout autumn when there is heavy leaf fall.

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We always do our best to maintain these systems, but many have been there for a long time and were not designed for today's weather events. No matter how well we plan and react, there is always the potential for debris and leaves to block drains again almost as soon as we leave.

How are drainage improvements prioritised?

Improvements are sometimes needed to cope with changes in the average rainfall conditions and to remedy any defective parts of the system.

Before any improvements are made a full assessment of the existing system is carried out to determine whether a satisfactory solution can be obtained by thoroughly cleaning or extending the existing arrangement.

Blocked drains

A sudden storm or downpour can often result in more water on the road than our gullies or ditches can cope with. In severe weather the capacity of the drainage system can be overwhelmed by the amount of water trying to run off from the road and flooding can sometimes occur.

Reports from our residents are really useful to ensure we prioritise any blocked ones. It does not mean we can avoid flooding, but when the combination of autumn leaf fall and heavy rain does occur, clean and well maintained gullies help to ensure the drainage is working as effectively as possible.

Flooding on the highway

Any gullies on the public highway that need cleaning or are blocked should be reported.

For all non urgent problems, such as blocked gullies and drains small areas of standing water or water flowing onto the highway from adjoining land, please contact us using the report it pages here:

<https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/reportroad>

To report urgent problems where there are large areas of standing water or the road is impassable

and where it is causing a safety hazard. Please telephone **0300 1234 222** (24 hour service) giving details of the location.

In extreme weather conditions, work will be prioritised according to the severity.

If a flood emergency is declared, Cornwall Council will deal with situation in line with its emergency management procedures. We will mobilise as many of our works gangs as possible across the affected areas of the county to be able to react and deal with any emerging situations.

Sandbags

The council holds a limited stock of sandbags in order to respond to flooding emergencies for use on the highway.

Stock is not held for distribution to householders but any requests are considered and prioritised on a case-by-case basis in the event of an emergency. In such instances the council will not have the resource to distribute them on mass.

How you can help

If you see signs telling you that cleaning will take place, please do not park your vehicle on or near a gully.

Remove fallen leaves covering gully grids if you can do this safely. When doing so, please ensure you:

- Wear gloves if you are clearing leaves by hand.
- Put leaves in your normal rubbish bin or in a compost bin.
- Be careful not to step into traffic on the road and be aware of pedestrians.
- Don't lift the drain covers or put your hands into the drain as there might be sharp objects you cannot see.

Please make arrangements to purchase sandbags from local suppliers and consider having a ready supply to divert water from your property. Useful guidance can be found on the Environment Agency website here: **<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency>**

If you would like this information in another format or language please contact us:

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