



The voice for water consumers
Llais defnyddwyr dŵr

Lifting the Lid: The Secrets of our Water Habits

Insight Report by Yonder Consulting
January 2023



Contents



The voice for water consumers
Llais defnyddwyr dŵr

[Foreword](#)

[Background, objectives and methodology](#)

[Respondent profile](#)

[Executive summary](#)

[Detailed findings](#)

[Recommendations](#)

[Appendix](#)

Foreword



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Water plays an important part in all our daily lives; however, for this research, we wanted to shine a light on some of the more unusual – and often wasteful – ways in which we use water. We tested a range of household habits to find out just how common they were – and whether people viewed them as being wasteful.

The results were eye-opening. Almost one in five people surveyed across England and Wales (17%) admitted to running the bathroom tap to cover up the sound of them using the loo. Even more strikingly, almost half (48%) said that they had taken a shower after going to the loo for a “number two”.

Other shower habits also stood out: 29% of people admitted to running the shower for longer than they were actually using it, ‘just to get [some] peace and quiet from family or housemates’, while the more musical (38%) said that they had spent extra time running a shower because they were singing.

These findings reveal the hidden – and sometimes quite worrying – ways people may be wasting water every day, without even realising it. Moreover, it’s surprising that in many cases it is younger people, aged 18-34 – who often appear more environmentally savvy – that are the most wasteful, suggesting this issue could become more pressing over time.

The results also varied by region: of almost all the various wasteful habits we surveyed, Londoners were the most likely to admit doing them, whether it was taking longer showers than needed or running the taps while they went to the loo.

However, our research also gives grounds for optimism, in that Londoners were particularly likely to acknowledge that they could be more water efficient – with 70% agreeing, against an England/Wales average of 63% - so there is an opportunity to help guide them in this ambition. This bolsters the need for consistent, and more engaging messaging and advice across the sector on areas such as water saving, which will be a key in our new ‘sector that works for people’ programme and our ‘people and the environment’ programme in 2023-24

By showing that unusual water habits are in fact more common than people might think, this research aims to give both consumers and water companies greater insight into water behaviours and help in targeting those water using activities that can be easily adjusted but have the biggest beneficial effect.

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Background, objectives and methodology

Background and objectives



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CCW wanted to understand people's 'unusual' water habits. To do this we built upon a [survey](#) conducted by Bristol Water and McCann on this topic back in 2019. CCW aimed to build on their research to understand what unusual water habits people are engaging in across England and Wales.

1

Understand 'unusual' water habits people engage in across England and Wales

2

Identify any differences in water habits by region

Methodology

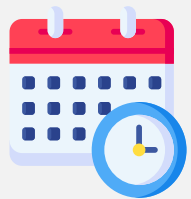


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Overview



Online survey of 2,126 adults (aged 18+) in England and Wales



Fieldwork conducted 5th – 9th December 2022.



The full sample has been weighted to be representative of England and Wales combined based upon the 2011 Census profile. The boost sample has been weighted down to be representative of Wales

Approach

CCW commissioned Yonder Consulting to undertake an online omnibus survey in England and Wales.

Yonder own and manage a highly engaged online panel of 180,000 UK adults and this resource was used as the primary source of sample for the online survey.

Yonder conducted 2,126 online interviews with consumers in England and Wales. Boost interviews were conducted among consumers in Wales to allow for robust analysis and weighted back into the overall sample at the correct proportions.

Sampling

A stratified sampling technique was employed using multiple demographic groupings to select respondents randomly from Yonder Consulting's online panel. This approach helps to minimise selection bias and ensure certain segments of the population are not over- or under-represented.

Quotas were set on age, gender, region and social grade. The data was then weighted based upon the 2011 Census profile of England and Wales combined. Rim weighting was applied for age, gender, government office region, social grade, taken a foreign holiday in the last 3 years, number of cars in the household, and working status. Tenure was weighted based upon the England and Wales profile as individual nations. The boost sample was weighted down to match the 2011 Census profile of Wales.

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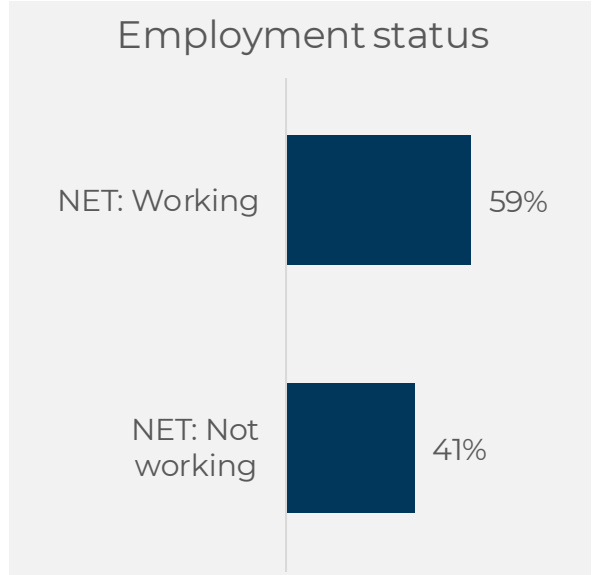
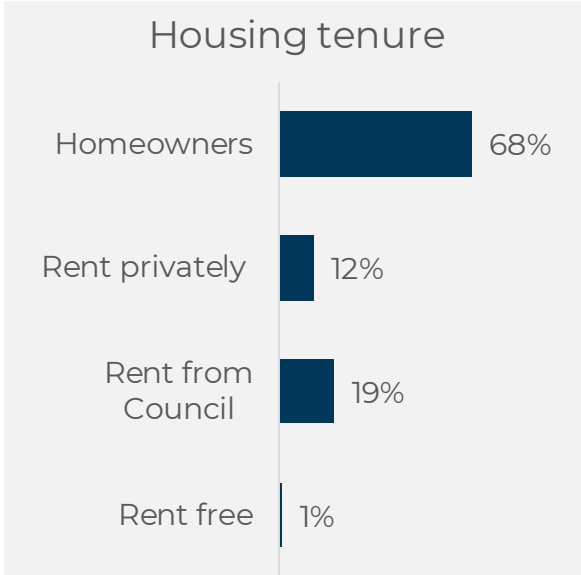
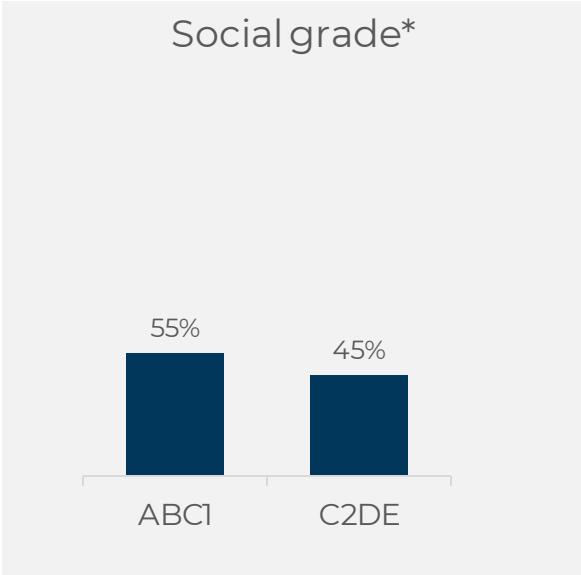
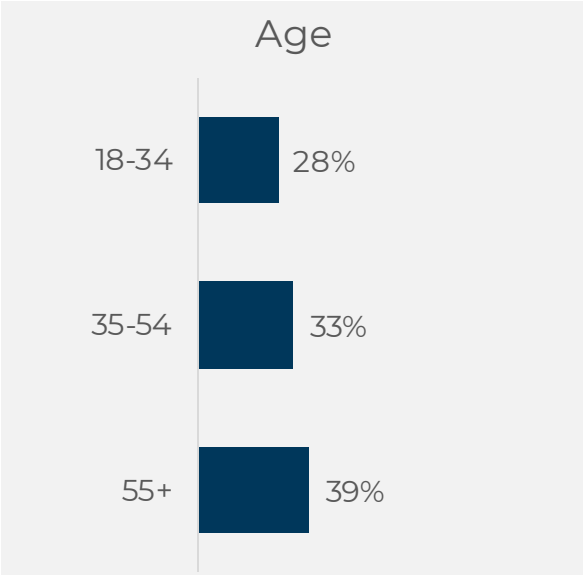
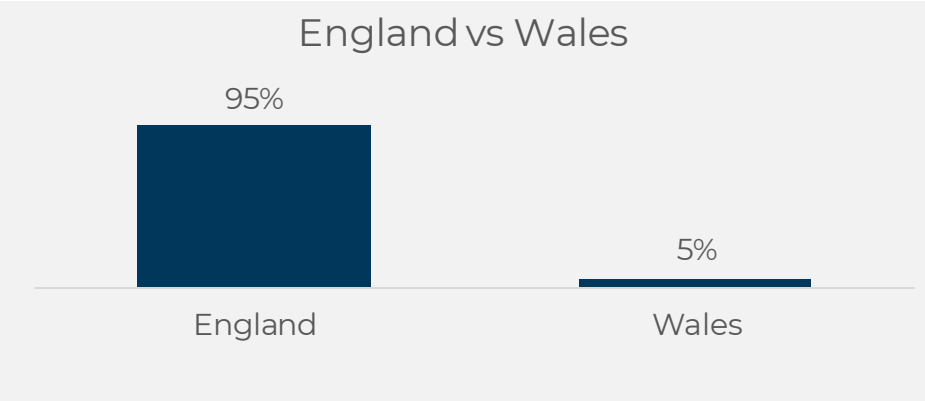
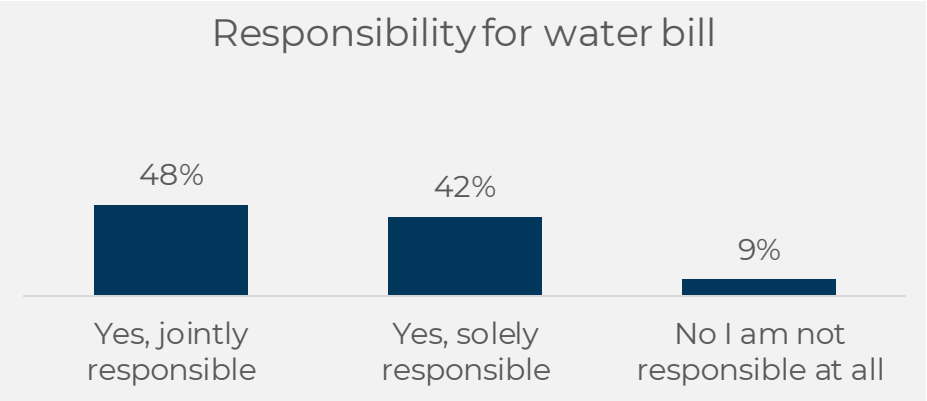
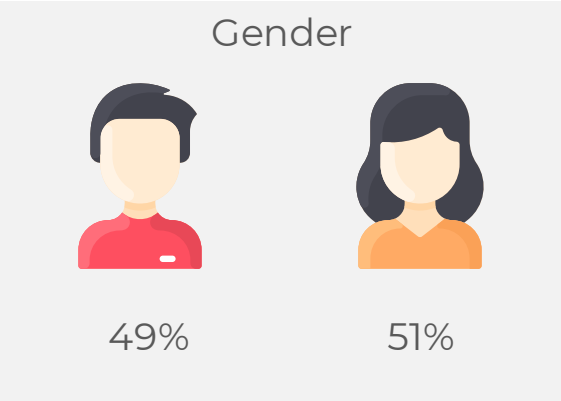
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Respondent profile

Respondent profile



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*Social grade is a demographic classification based on the occupation of a household's chief income earner. AB is higher or intermediate, managerial, administrative or professional; C1 is supervisory or clerical and junior managerial, administrative or professional; C2 is skilled manual workers; DE is semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, state pensioners, casual workers and unemployed with state benefits only



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Executive summary



Executive summary (1 of 2)



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Water efficiency

- Over six in ten (63%) of people in England and Wales feel they could be more water efficient; with most claiming they could possibly be more water efficient (49%) compared to 14% who said definitely.
- Those who are more likely to claim they could be more water efficient tend to be:
 - Younger people, aged 18-34 (82%) compared to other age groups 35-43 (63%) and 55+ year olds (51%)
 - Those working (70%) vs. not working (53%)
 - Individuals in social grade ABC1 (66%) vs. C2DE (60%)
 - Those in the West Midlands (72%) and London (70%) vs. England and Wales overall (63%).

Water behaviours

- Just under a fifth (17%) of people have run the tap to cover “toilet noises”.
- Those who run a tap to cover up toilet noises tend to be:
 - Living in London (22%) vs. England and Wales overall (17%)
 - Younger people, aged 18-34 (32%) vs. 35-54 (18%) and 55+ year olds (6%)
 - Those who claim they could be more water efficient (23%) vs. those who could not (6%)
 - Women (20%) vs men (13%).
- Among people who run the tap to cover up “toilet noises”, four in ten (40%) do so for up to 1 minute; followed by 1-2 minutes (31%).
- However, most of the general public (73%) disagree they’d rather watch water go down the drain than let others hear them in the loo.
- A majority (70%) agree it’s okay to skip a shower some days

Executive summary (2 of 2)



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Water activities

- Twenty five different activities were presented to respondents across questions 7 to 9.
- The top ten activities people have ever done are: flush the toilet twice after having a number two (90%); put the washing machine/dishwasher on when they are not full (67%); taken a bath/shower to cool down (66%); washed an item of clothing that wasn't really dirty (65%); stayed in the bath so long it needed topping up with warm water (59%); accidentally over watered a plant and killed it (58%); urinated whilst taking a shower (57%); taken a bath/shower because it was cold (50%); decided to take a shower after having a number two (48%); used steam from the shower/bath to soothe coughs/nose and aches and pains (42%).
- Those who feel they could be more water efficient are more likely to have done most of the top 10 activities.
- People in social grade ABC1, aged 18-34 and those who work are also more likely to have participated in these activities.
- Seven out of the 25 activities were more likely to have ever been done by people living in England compared to those living in Wales. Londoners specifically were more likely to have ever done 14 out of the 25 activities compared to the England and Wales average.

Water wastage

- Most people who have run the shower for longer than they used it due to being on their phone or being distracted (27%) felt it to be a waste of water (77%).
- Londoners are less likely than average to realise that watering a plant that is unlikely to come back to life (50% vs. 64% of the total sample), washing the same load more than once (59% vs. 70% of the total sample) and staying in the bath long enough for it to need topping up with hot water (53% vs. 62% of the total sample) are inefficient uses of water.
- When comparing the top 10 activities people have taken versus whether they considered it to be a waste of water; people are less likely to view flushing the toilet twice after having a number two, having a bath/shower to cool down, or urinating in the shower as a waste of water. However, whilst the former activities do waste water, the latter activity conserves it.

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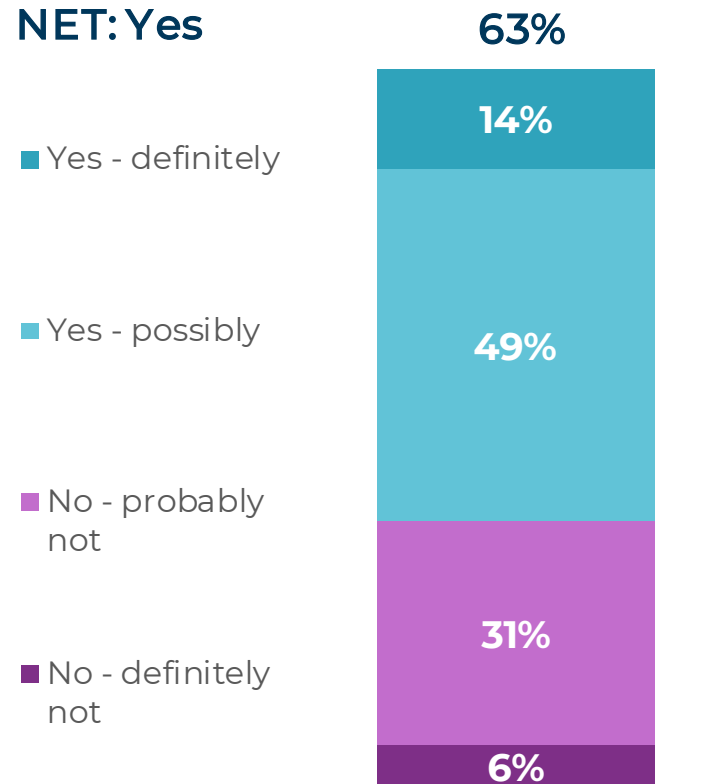
Detailed findings

Over six in ten feel they could be more water efficient. Those in the West Midlands and London, younger people, those in social grades ABC1 and working people are more likely to feel that way



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Perception of whether they could be more water efficient



The following groups are more likely to claim they could be more water efficient:

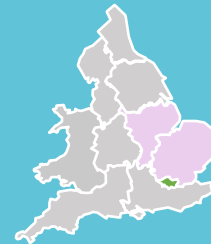
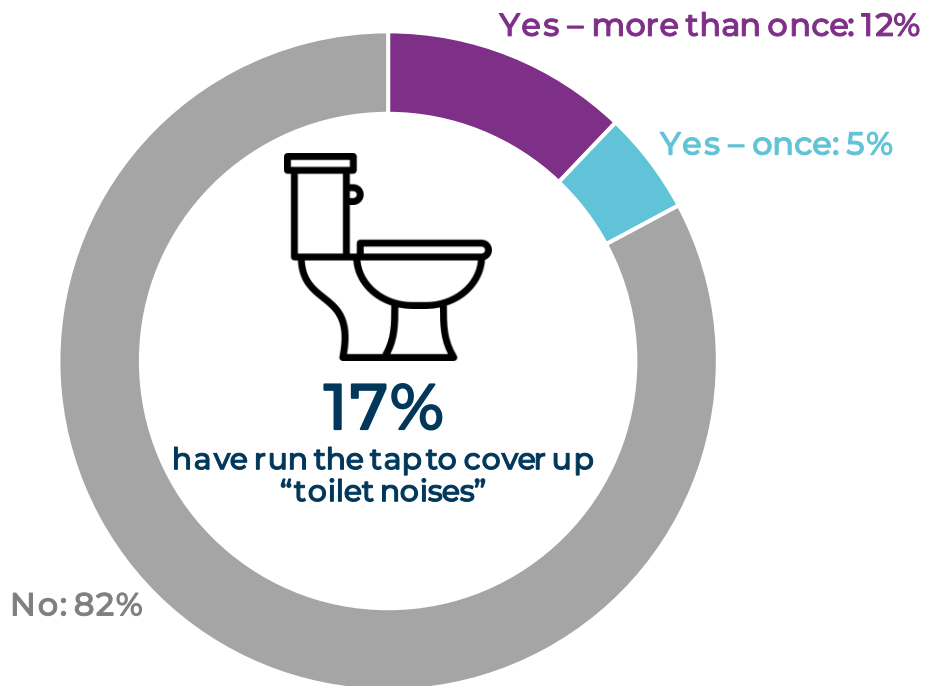
- Those in the West Midlands (72%) and London (70%) vs. England and Wales overall (63%)
- Younger people, aged 18-34 (82%) vs. 35-54 (63%) and 55+ (51%) year olds
 - Those working (70%) vs. not working (53%)
 - Social grade ABC1 (66%) vs. C2DE (60%)

Just under a fifth of people admit to having ever run the tap to cover up “toilet noises”, with people in London, younger people, those who know they could save more water, women and those working most likely



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Ever run the tap to cover up “toilet noises” (claimed)



Those who run a tap to cover up toilet noises are more likely to be:

- In London (22%) vs. England and Wales overall (17%) – where as those in Eastern England (10%) and the East Midlands (9%) are less likely to run the tap.
 - 18-34 year olds (32%) vs. 35-54 (18%), 55+ year olds (6%)
- Those who claim they could be more water efficient (23%) vs. those who could not (6%)
 - Women (20%) vs. men (13%)
 - Those in work (21%) vs. those not working (11%)

Q4. Have you ever run the tap when going to the loo to cover up “toilet noises” so others don't hear what you are up to? Base: All respondents (2,126); London (287); Eastern England (200); East Midlands (149); 18-34 (596); 35-54 (693); 55+ (837); Could be more water efficient (1,353); Couldn't be more water efficient (773); Women (1,077); Men (1,045); Working (1,216); Not working (910). 14

Of those who claim to have ever run the tap to cover up toilet noises, most do so for up to 2 minutes



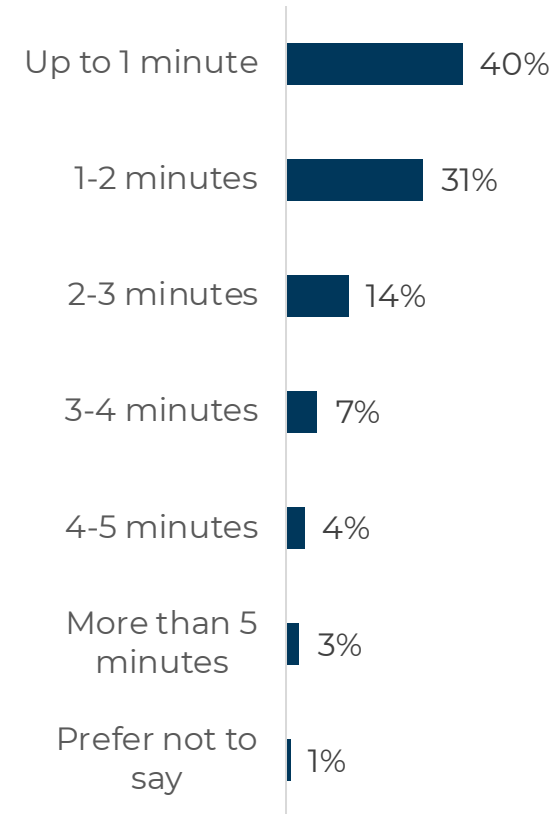
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Length of time tap is run to cover up "toilet noises" (claimed)



17%

have run the tap to cover up "toilet noises"



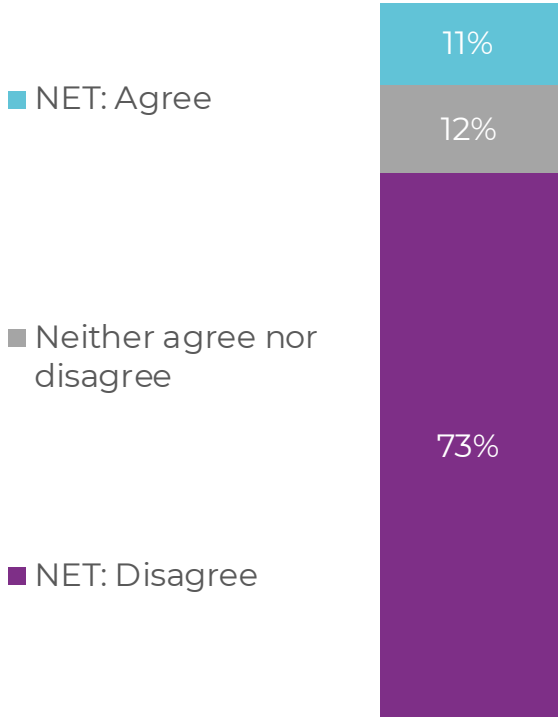
Q5. You stated you have run a tap when going to the loo to cover up "toilet noises" so others don't hear what you are up to. Roughly how long on average did you run the tap for? Base: All who have run a tap when going to the loo (363).

Conserving water is more important than masking toilet noises for most people in England and Wales



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Levels of agreement – I'd rather watch water go down the drain than let a loved one, friend or colleague hear me in the loo



The following are more likely to disagree they'd rather watch water be wasted than let others hear them in the toilet – i.e. prioritise water conservation:

- Those in London (17%) vs. England and Wales overall (11%) – where as those in the East Midlands are less likely (4%)
 - 55+ year olds (82%) vs. 35-54 (71%) and 18-34 (62%)
- Those who feel they couldn't be more water efficient (80%) vs. could be water efficient (69%)
 - People who are not working (77%) vs. working (70%)
 - Homeowners (75%) vs. renters (69%)
 - Social grade ABC1 (75%) vs. C2DE (71%)

Q6. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? 'I'd rather watch water go down the drain than let a loved one, friend or colleague hear me in the loo'.

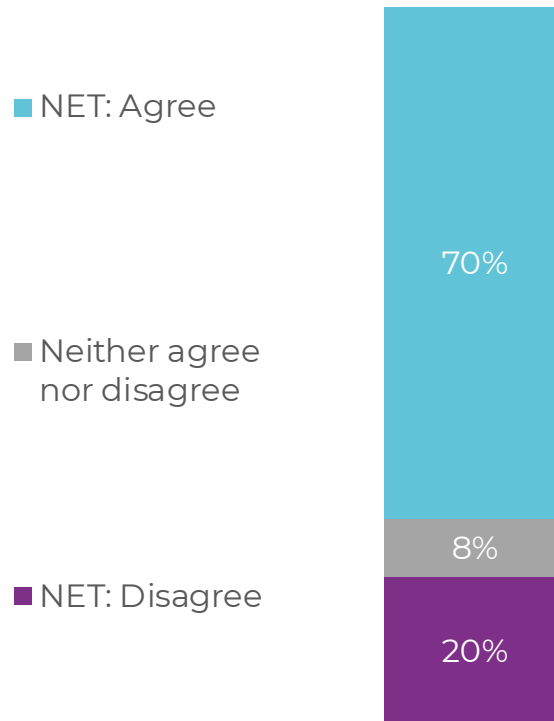
Base: All respondents (2,126); London 287; East Midlands (149); Could be more water efficient (1,353); Couldn't be more water efficient (773); ABC1 (1,179); C2DE (947); 18-34 (596), 35-54 (693); 55+ (837); Working (1,216); Not working (910); Homeowners (1,318); Renters (764).

The majority of people in England and Wales agree it is okay to skip a shower some days



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Levels of agreement – It's okay to skip a shower some days



The following groups are more likely to agree it's okay to skip a shower some days:

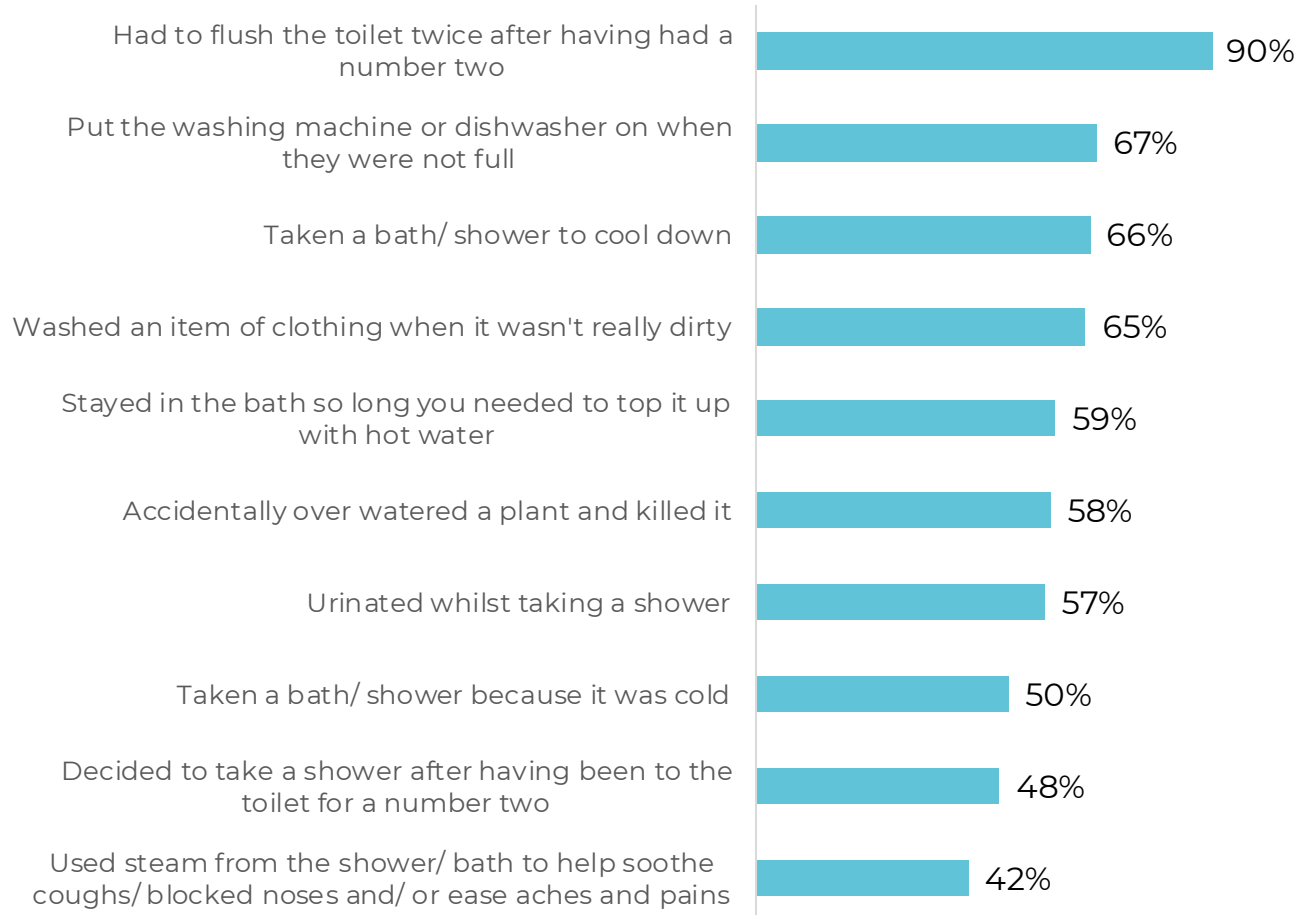
- Those who are not working (75%) vs. working (67%)
- People who feel they couldn't be more water efficient (74%) vs. could be water efficient (68%)
- 55+ year olds (76%) vs. 35-54 (70%) and 18-34 year olds (63%)
 - Women (73%) vs. men (67%)

Having to flush the toilet twice after doing a number two is the most common of the activities listed



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Top 10 activities people have ever done – % NET: Ever



Those who feel they could be more water efficient are more likely to have done most of the top 10 activities.

This is also true for people in social grade ABC1, aged 18-34 and those who work

The majority of people in England and Wales have had to flush the toilet twice after having had a number two, and it is also the activity most likely to be done very or quite often



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Activities people have done: Ever and Very/quite often (1 of 3)



People who live in Wales are more likely to put the washing machine or dishwasher on when they are not full (72%) and accidentally over watered a plant and killed it (66%) compared to England (67% and 58%).

Those in London are more likely to have ever decided to take a shower after having been to the toilet for a number two (60%) vs. England and Wales overall (48%).

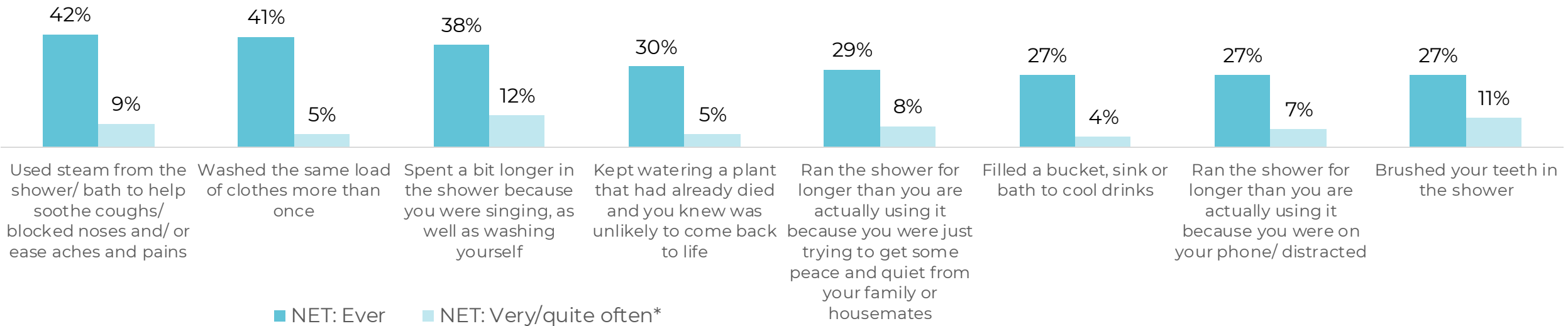
Q7-Q9. How often, if ever, have you done any of the following?
Base: All respondents (2,126); England (1,726); Wales (400); London (287). 19
*Please note, NET: Very/quite often is included as part of NET: Ever


Using steam to ease physical symptoms, washing clothes more than once and spending extra time in the shower singing are activities that around one in four people have done




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Activities people have done: Ever and Very/quite often (2 of 3)



 People who live in England are more likely to have ran the shower for longer than using it because they were on their phone/distracted (28%) and because they were trying to get peace and quiet from others (30%) compared to those in Wales (19% and 21%).

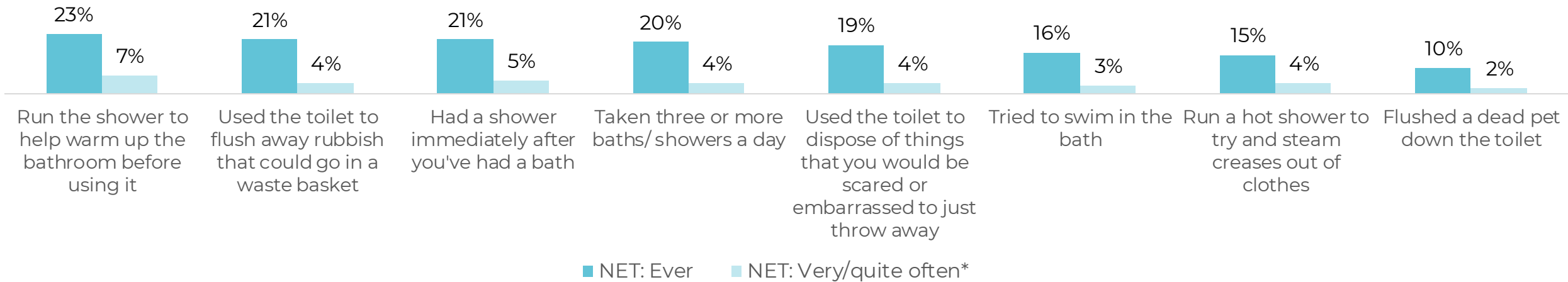

 Londoners are more likely to have engaged in a range of water inefficient activities than those in England and Wales overall. This includes showering for longer because they were singing (47%), continuing to water a dead plant, showering for longer to get some peace and quiet (36% each) and using water to cool drinks (33%). However, they are also more likely to have brushed their teeth in the shower (35%), which is a water efficient activity.

Less common activities are flushing a dead pet down the toilet, using shower steam to remove creases and swimming in the bath




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Activities people have done: Ever and Very/quite often (3 of 3)

People who live in England are more likely to have ever done a range of these activities compared to those in Wales. These are running the shower to warm up the bathroom (24% vs. 14% Wales); flushing away rubbish (21% vs. 16% Wales); using steam from the shower to get creases out of clothes (15% vs. 10% Wales); using the toilet to dispose of things they would be scared/embarrassed to throw away (19% vs. 12% Wales) and trying to swim in the bath (16% vs. 10% Wales).



Londoners are more likely to have engaged in all of the activities listed on this slide compared to England and Wales overall – see following slide for details.

People in North West England are more likely to have had a shower immediately after having a bath (31%) and have flushed a dead pet down the toilet (16%) than in England and Wales overall.

Of the 25 activities asked about, Londoners were significantly more likely to have ever done 14 of the activities



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Activities significantly more likely to have been done in England and Wales overall vs. London: NET Ever

Activity	England & Wales overall	London
Decided to take a shower after having been to the toilet for a number two	48%	60%
Spent a bit longer in the shower because you were singing, as well as washing yourself	38%	47%
Kept watering a plant that had already died and you knew was unlikely to come back to life	30%	36%
Ran the shower for longer than you are actually using it because you were just trying to get some peace and quiet from your family or housemates	29%	36%
Filled a bucket, sink or bath to cool drinks	27%	33%
Brushed your teeth in the shower	27%	35%
Run the shower to help warm up the bathroom before using it	23%	37%

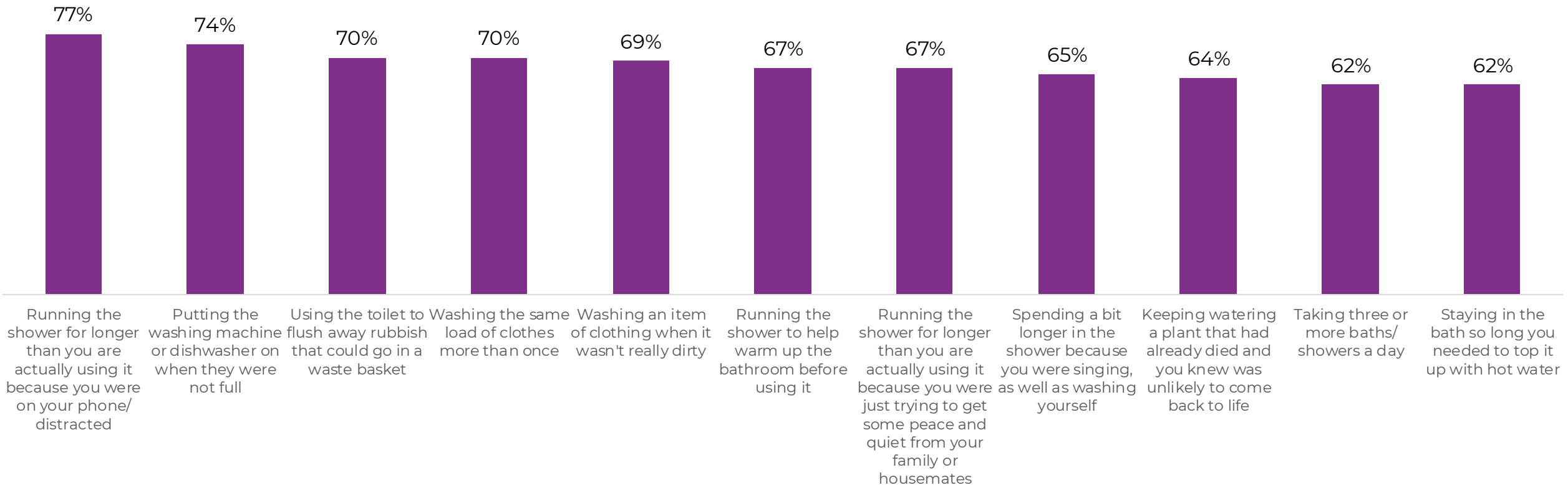
Activity	England & Wales overall	London
Used the toilet to flush away rubbish that could go in a waste basket	21%	30%
Had a shower immediately after you've had a bath	21%	27%
Taken three or more baths/ showers a day	20%	29%
Used the toilet to dispose of things that you would be scared or embarrassed to just throw away	19%	28%
Tried to swim in the bath	16%	21%
Run a hot shower to try and steam creases out of clothes	15%	25%
Flushed a dead pet down the toilet	10%	15%

Many of the wasteful water activities tested are correctly viewed to be wasteful by the general public



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Activities that are a waste of water % Yes (1 of 2)

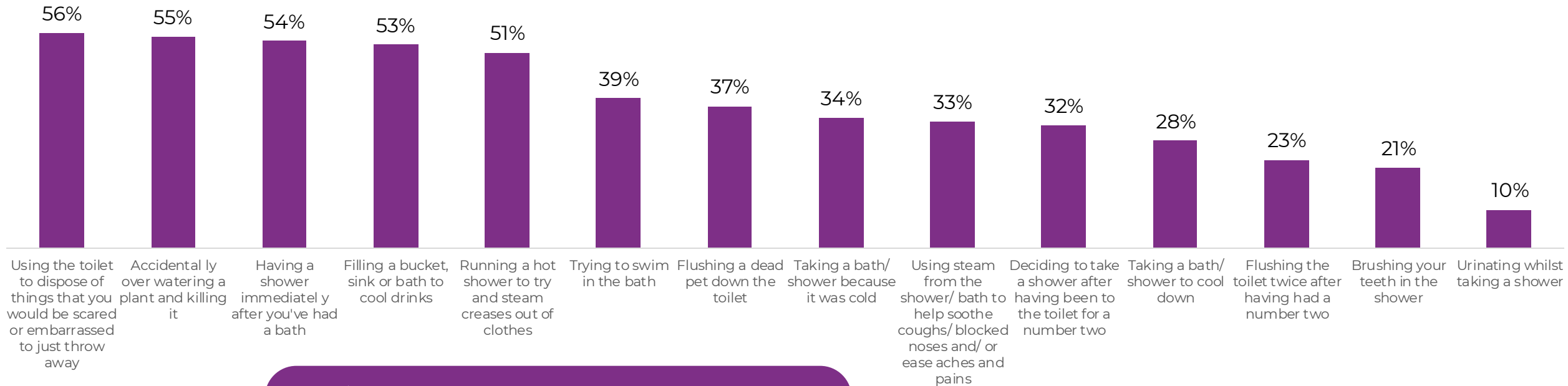



Activities such as brushing teeth and urinating whilst taking a shower are generally considered to be an efficient use of water



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Activities that are a waste of water % Yes (2 of 2)

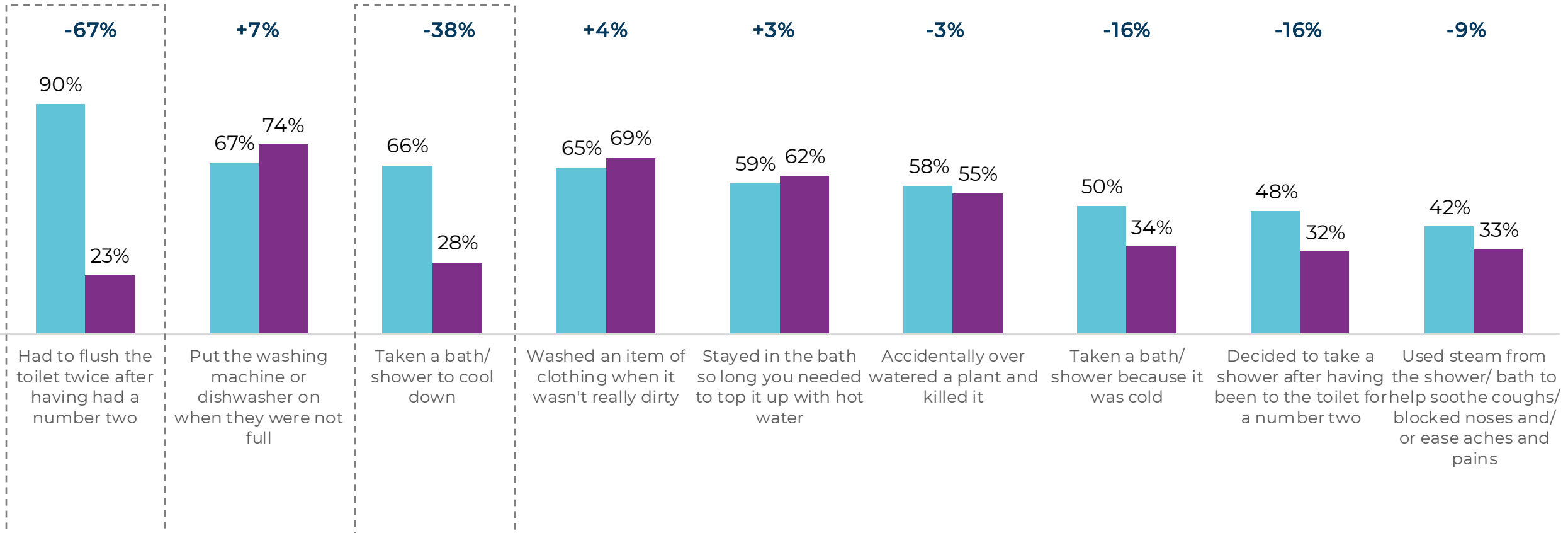
Londoners are significantly less likely to realise that the following activities are wasteful, compared to England and Wales overall: continuing to water a dead plant (50%), washing the same load more than once (59%), staying in the bath long enough for it to need topping up with hot water (53%)*.

Whilst many have flushed the toilet twice after taking a number two and taken a shower to cool down, few consider these to be wasteful activities



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Comparison of activities taken (% NET: Ever) vs Waste of water (% yes)



Q7-Q9. How often, if ever, have you done any of the following? % NET: Ever
Base: All respondents (2,126).

Q10. Do you consider any of the following to be a waste of water? 25
Base: All who have ever done action (210 - 1449)

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Recommendations

Recommendations



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1. The general public tend to acknowledge that they could be more water efficient, so there is opportunity to help guide them in that aim
2. Tips on saving water could focus on the following activities because they are fairly common but people do not realise are wasteful:
 - If you find yourself repeatedly having to flush your toilet more than once, make sure that you are using the right button on a dual flush toilet.
 - Taking a bath or shower after having a number two – stop and think if a full shower or bath is needed, and if it is – keep to the 4 minute shower challenge
 - Taking a bath or shower to cool down or warm up – stop and think if there are other ways of warming up (wrap up in cosy blankets or a jumper) or cooling down (changing into cooler clothing, or sitting in a cooler part of the house or garden)

The following activities are acknowledged by the public as wasteful, so tips on how to tackle these habits could also be productive, as well as cost-saving for customers reducing water and energy bills.

- Running the shower for longer than necessary because they are distracted
 - Using the dishwasher or washing machine when it is not full
3. Target tips towards those in England, and specifically London. Those in England and particularly London are most likely to engage in activities that use water inefficiently, and there is evidence that Londoners are less aware that some of these behaviours are inefficient.

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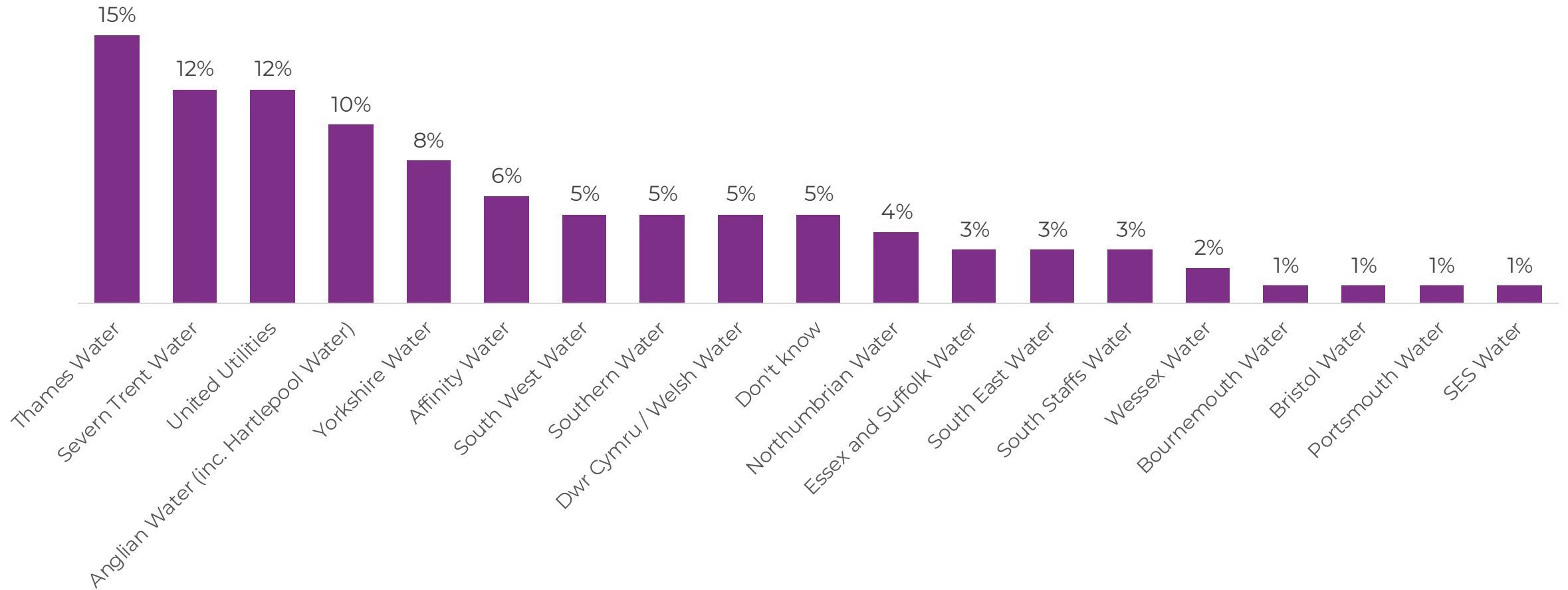
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Appendix

Water Companies



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