

Fact Sheet: Staining

Staining of laundry or other household items can be a problem experienced by customers at different times. The information below may be of assistance.

Stained washing

Stained washing can be attributed to a number of different causes including the water supply, fabric softeners, the washing machine and even your backyard trees.

Water supply

Western Water's water supply is filtered and disinfected before it reaches your property. However, sometimes elements within the water supply can be the cause of staining. Iron and manganese are naturally occurring substances found in all surface water. If high levels of iron and/or manganese are present in your water supply, they may cause yellow staining on your washing.

To determine if your water supply is the cause of staining, fold a white towel four or six times and then hold it tightly against the cold water tap in the laundry, next to the washing machine. Turn the tap on and off for at least two minutes. If the towel becomes stained, the water supply is the most probable cause of staining.

If you discover that this is the case, run a tap at the rear of the house into a bucket for at least two minutes to help flush the pipes. If the problem continues, contact Western Water's water quality team for further advice.

Fabric softeners

If the water supply is found to be the cause of stains, refrain from using fabric softeners until the problem is rectified, as softeners can increase staining by coating the clothes and trapping sediment in the fabric.

Soaking stained clothes in a good detergent or bleach solution, which doesn't contain softening agents, followed by a machine wash using tap water (as long as the initial problem has been rectified) can usually clean clothes stained by water.

Washing machine

Washing machines may also cause staining. To determine if your washing machine is causing the problem, place a load of dirty clothes in the machine and run it through a wash cycle. Turn the machine off, and without unravelling the clothes, take them out and place them on the table. If the parts of your clothes that were touching the wall of the machine are stained in the form of coloured spots, your washing machine may require cleaning. This staining usually occurs when dirt is redeposited on clothes because too little washing detergent has been used.

Detergents draw dirt out of clothes and hold it in the water to stop the dirt from resettling on clothing. If too little detergent is used, some of the dirt may be redeposited on your clothes and on the inside of the machine. To prevent this, ensure you use the recommended amount of detergent for the load size and clean your washing machine regularly.

Gum trees

If your clothesline is located under a gum tree, it may be staining your washing. Some varieties of gum trees drop resin, which falls on clothing as a light brown streaky stain.

These stains, which are commonly misinterpreted as being caused by dirty water, are in fact caused by gum tree/leaf resin. The staining will normally occur during periods of heavy rain when the resin from the leaves is collected and dispersed onto the clothes in a clear state. When the clothes are rewashed, the clear resin entraps dirt during the wash cycle, leaving brownish streaks on the washing. The stains are normally distributed at the same angle that the rainfall makes contact with the fabric, ie straight up and down.

The obvious way to rectify this problem is to move your clothesline into a position clear of trees and other obstructions. You also have the option of removing the tree, however this may prove costly. Before carrying out any work involving trees on your property, always check with your local council to determine if provisions exist to protect native vegetation in your area. A permit may be required to remove or lop certain tree species.

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Staining in other areas of the home

Pots and pans

Calcium in the water supply can cause aluminium pots and pans to form black stains. A calcium build up in the water supply is often the result of new cement lined water mains or elevated levels of calcium in bore water.

Calcium in water mains is more often than not a temporary problem, which settles over time, however calcium in bore water can be a long-term problem. Please contact our water quality team if calcium levels are a problem in your bore water supply.

To remove calcium-related stains from your aluminium pots and pans, mix two tablespoons of sodium bicarbonate with one litre of water in the affected saucepan and boil for ten minutes. Remove the cleaning solution film by rubbing with a soap pad and rinse. Store any remaining solution in a sealed container for further use. Alternatively, commercial products can be purchased from your local supermarket to remove calcium build up.

Sinks, baths and toilet bowls

High levels of copper and/or ammonia in water can cause blue and green staining of sinks, baths and toilet bowls. This is often a result of copper corrosion or traces of ammonia in your household pipes, which generally occurs in new plumbing. Over time, a protective layer will form on the inside of the copper pipes, slowly reducing this negative effect.

To remove green/blue staining from surfaces around the house, use a lemon-based cleaning product (containing citric acid) or cloudy ammonia. Avoid using aggressive cleaning products to scrub polished surfaces as they can scratch.

Further information

Please contact Western Water on 1300 650 425 and ask to speak to a member of our water quality team.