



Marshalls

Transforming Britain's Landscapes

Future Water Legislation

Comment from Chris Harrop, Group Marketing Director

New government legislation on the supply and use of water, Future Water, came into force in late 2008. With changes ranging from tap water metering to flooding countermeasures, the scale of impact for the hard landscaping industry was significant with both landscapers and manufacturers encouraged to provide water permeable solutions that comply with technical standards to eliminate water run-off.

As a solution, the legislation introduces 'Sustainable Urban Drainage Solutions', or SUDS. SUDS are hard landscaping products designed to allow an acceptable volume of surface water to permeate through into the ground below, helping to reduce surface run-off and limit the impact on street drains. This means a driveway can act as though it were still a garden.

As a result of Future Water and growing environmental concerns, Marshalls introduced a range of permeable paving solutions for the domestic market and converted every core domestic driveway product to a permeable version. The entire Marshalls sales force was also trained on Future Water as well training for the Register of Approved Installers on how to install SUDS professionally.

How does Future Water affect consumers?

The industry likely to be most affected by proposals for planning restrictions on all non-water permeable paving materials is the landscaping industry. Any property owner or developer wishing to install a new driveway or paved area in the front of a house now has to apply for planning permission from their local authority.

This section of the legislation aims to combat flooding in urban areas caused by rainfall surface run-off. The increase in surface water run-off and consequent pressure on outdated drainage systems is attributed to the rise in popularity of driveways and paving over the last few years. This is as a direct result of the increase in the number of households with two or more cars, whether through increased wealth or the huge increase in the number of children over 18 staying at home. In his interim report on the

widespread flooding in 2007, Sir Michael Pitt implied that two thirds of the damage was caused by surface water run-off, overloading the drainage systems.

The legislation aims to work in three ways: first, to give the local government some measurement and control over the amount of properties that intend to lay down new paving or new driveways; second, it deters the property owners and developers from laying down too much paving; and third, it encourages the property owner to consider water-permeable solutions.

For the landscaping industry, there are many implications. First and foremost, both landscapers and manufacturers will be encouraged to provide water permeable solutions (SUDS) that comply with technical standards to eliminate run-off. They will need to be able to communicate compliance to the consumer and as an industry will have to work more closely with local authorities to anticipate the demand for materials.

In London alone, an estimated two thirds of front gardens are now paved over. Where rainfall was once absorbed into front gardens, it is now forced to run into antiquated drainage systems that simply cannot cope with such a volume.

This new legislation should help encourage property owners and developers to use SUDS when creating new or replacing their driveways to help reduce the risk of flooding. For this reason, I feel the legislation is long overdue. The widespread flooding in the summer of 2007 highlighted the real need for a national strategy in terms of property development, especially in high-risk flood areas.

However, the legislation does fall short in critical areas. Implementation of the strategy effectively requires the full cooperation of manufacturers, suppliers, landscapers and installers, property owners and local authorities. The legislation will be difficult to enforce as property owners may simply expand their driveways or patios without permission, as a result of either ignorance or intolerance of the new procedures. Local authorities will therefore be expected to police the legislation. Furthermore a clear universal labelling system for water permeable solutions will be needed, and this will have to be communicated and complied to, at all levels of the process.

It will be interesting to see how the industry and consumers react to this legislation now it's been in place over six months.