



The Floods and Water Bill will alter the way that drainage is viewed by the construction industry. Merchants will have to adapt the way that they sell to reap the benefits.

**T**he recent bouts of flooding that hit the north west in November last year devastated homes and businesses across several small towns and villages. The region is no stranger to devastating floods – it is the wettest regions of the country, receiving an average of 130 inches of rain per year. The rain may have caused the most damage in Cumbria, but it wasn't just that region that suffered through heavy rain. According to the Met Office, last November was the wettest on record, with an average of 217.4 mm of rain falling across the UK, beating 1951's previous record of 193.6 mm. Cumbria received three times that amount across the month. Heavy rainfall may not be a new phenomenon on the British Isles, but regular flooding, be it devastatingly large scale or a localised nuisance, is becoming a much more prominent problem – partially a symptom of antique drainage systems, partly a byproduct of an increase in impermeable surfaces. It has become a big enough problem that the government has been pressured to do something about it. First came new regulations on impermeable driveways, requiring householders to build in a drainage solution, be it a channel drainage

system or permeable paving. This year, the solution comes in the Floods and Water Bill, blanket legislation brought in to protect individuals, businesses and communities from the risk of flooding and drought. The government says it is acting to protect the country's sewer infrastructure and its supplies of drinking water. Investigations following the floods of 2007, which claimed 13 lives, found that two thirds of all flood events are the direct result of the existing drainage network being overloaded by surface water and that, as a result, one in six homes are now at risk of serious flooding. More adaptable drainage systems are needed alongside changes to planning regulations if the risk of flooding is to be reduced, which is why the government has moved to enforce the use of SUDS, which return surface run-off to local ground rather than discharging straight into the sewer network, a lot of which is still ill-equipped to cope with storm surges. The Bill also clarifies lines of responsibility for the management of surface water. Previously it was split between the Environment Agency, local authorities, water companies, and other agencies; no single organisation had overall

responsibility. The new Bill gives local authorities day-to-day responsibility for preparing and putting in place strategies for managing flood risk from groundwater, surface water and ordinary watercourses in their areas. "The most significant change will be the move to enforce the use of sustainable drainage systems – SUDS on all new and redevelopment sites," says Peter Ridgway, market development director for ACO Technologies. "In essence this ends the automatic right to make new, conventional surface water drainage connections to the main sewer network." Once the Bill passes, all plans for new and refurbished sewer connections will need to be approved by a SUDS Approving Body (SAB). This will be the unitary or county council for a specific region. This is the first time that legal responsibility for surface water management has been assigned to local authorities.

### Approval required

The SAB needs to approve any proposed drainage system before construction can start. This applies to both permitted developments and those requiring planning permission. This is to ensure that SUDS are

included in sites that might cover large surface areas but which do not require planning permission. Any proposed drainage system will also need to be designed in accordance with new guidelines. The National Standards for the Design and Construction of Sustainable Drainage Systems will be drafted in spring 2010, with the involvement of drainage industry. The standards will set out the criteria that will determine what form of drainage is appropriate for any particular site. It is also highly likely that the Bill will introduce a new charging structure for surface water connections to the sewer network, though that is yet to be confirmed. Based on the 'polluter pays' approach, it will be designed to raise additional funds to pay for improvements in the country's drainage infrastructure, and for a reward scheme for those who discharge lower volumes through the use of sustainable drainage or grey water recycling systems. The wider use of SUDS will mean that merchants will increasingly have to adopt 'water management' product ranges alongside conventional drainage systems, says Ridgway: "Water Management products allow control of surface water in accordance with SUDS principles;

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Kingspan Environmental

College Road North, Aston Clinton, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP22 5EW

Tel: +44 (0) 1296 633000 Fax: +44 (0) 1296 633001

email: [pollutiongb@kingspanenv.com](mailto:pollutiongb@kingspanenv.com)

Visit our website [www.kingspanenv.com](http://www.kingspanenv.com),  
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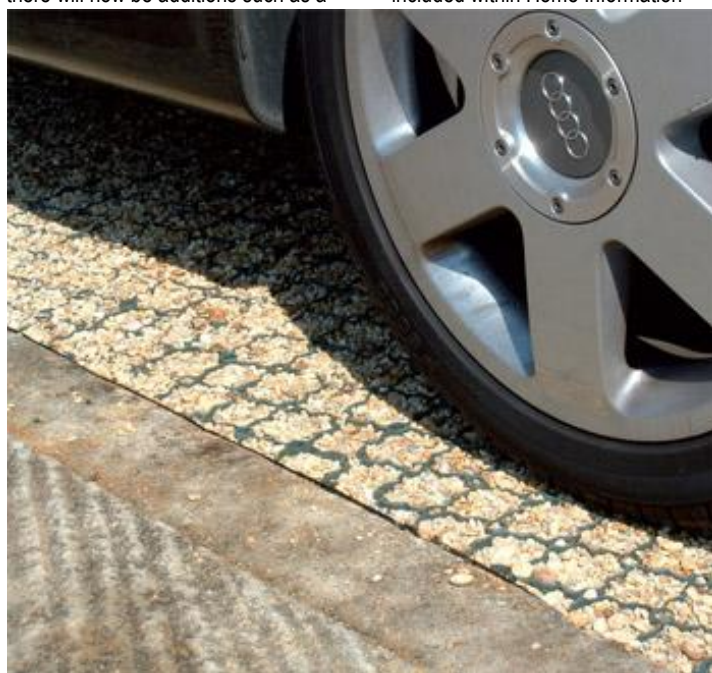
## DRAINAGE

that is collecting, cleaning, holding and safely releasing run-off. Customers will be looking for complete design solutions that integrate all the SUDS elements into easy to install systems. There will also be a greater demand for systems to be manufactured in a choice of materials as local authorities move to enforce requirements for minimum recycled content." Merchants will have to carry a greater number of stock lines with the capability of covering a far greater range of applications, says Ridgway. They will also need to be able to advise customers on national SUDS legislation, on design options and on any specific regulations required by the local SAB. "Supply relationships with manufacturers will also need to change if more lines are to be successfully carried. New packaging formats and a more flexible approach to minimum order quantities will be necessary to ensure that customers have access to the appropriate range of products," he says. Ridgway believes that there are some significant commercial benefits that will arise as a result of the Bill, and that merchants that offer a full range of SUDS systems will be best placed to take advantage of them.

### Integrated products

"Where an order for a conventional drainage system was once placed there will now be additions such as a

storm water attenuation tank and a soakaway. This will be the case in every sector of the market, from simple residential applications right through to large scale civils projects. The key to securing this additional business will be to provide fully integrated products - that is those that can easily be, in straight forward terms, 'bolted together' without the need for over-complicated planning, assemblies or tooling." Merchant staff will also need to be able to provide accurate and professional advice to customers. There is likely to be some confusion as to what is required once the new legislation comes into force, putting those merchants with knowledge and information in a very strong position when it comes to securing new business. "The importance of staff training and the ability to provide customers with clear guidance on the new Bill cannot be underestimated," says Ridgway. "In addition to the technical aspects of SUDS design, product options and the requirements of local SABs regarding planning, merchants will benefit from providing information on the new system of charging for mains drainage connections. For residential developers, being able to install a system that minimises any discharge fee will be a significant advantage as details of site drainage will, from now on, have to be included within Home Information



Packs." Ridgway inevitably puts suppliers forward as being in the best position to provide information and training. Though sending staff on intensive training courses away from their branches will be difficult in the current climate, there are some compact training courses available on the Floods and Water Bill that staff can work on without having to disrupt branch operations. Richard Hilton is the managing director of Fabweld Steel Products, an access and drain covers manufacturer that has been moving increasingly into flood water control solutions, creating bespoke systems to deal with each specific flooding issue – all of which are sold via merchants. Hilton is confident that, due to their position in the market, it will be easy for them to adapt to fit the Bill "With us being on the bespoke side of manufacturing, we can go in and look at things and come out with a solution to a given problem, design it, give them a 3D CAD design so that they can see what it looks like, make it, and then go in and get the item installed in a relatively short space of time." Caerphilly council came to them through a local merchant, initially Fabweld was looking to supply new drain covers in the area, but it soon became apparent that the region had some problems with flood water. "Every time the area was hit by heavy rainfall, the water would run down a certain road and flood the roads at the bottom. We went in and designed a big tank and grating system so the water is filtered through the tank and diverted to a soak-away elsewhere, eliminating the flooding issue. That issue had occurred because a farmer at the top of this road had concreted his front drive. The water was running off because he didn't put any drainage facilities in there. It then became the council's problem because the water was flooding the roads." Though all of the company's products are sold via builders merchants, once the merchant has taken the order from a customer with a flooding issue, Fabweld takes control of the process



from there, consulting, designing and manufacturing the system. Hilton says that for the merchants, the company ensures that any order or enquiry gets a quick response, and that the merchant is kept in the loop throughout the whole process. "In this day and age, the speed of everything is what matters, and that's what we offer." As the demand for flood water management systems grows, Hilton is concerned that some merchants might miss a trick without realising it – all sales staff need to be able to spot an opportunity to sell SUDS and flood water management systems, even if the customer is vague about what they need. Hilton is concerned that not all merchant staff will be up to speed.

### Complete awareness

"When a contractor goes into a merchant with a problem that needs solving, those problems should not be dismissed outright as unsolvable – there is usually a solution out there to allow them to fix the problem that they've got. You've got to think outside the box in these situations and use the suppliers and manufacturers in the country to help solve the customer's issue. It's about using the resources available to them on their suppliers list." Fabweld offers product training to merchant

staff to help them learn to identify the opportunities to sell complete solutions to flooding issues. The company also visits merchants with presentations explaining the general opportunities available from the flood prevention market. Hilton believes that complete awareness is the best tool for selling solutions rather than products: "I think some merchants are very good at spotting opportunities and some merchants are not; they're just order-takers. "If they haven't got the product there or they don't know about a product, they won't offer the customer the right solution." Fabweld is starting to produce case studies for different projects they have completed, to provide some merchandising and marketing support for its merchant customers and to raise awareness of the service it provides. This is important, says Hilton, as what the company offers is far removed from a standard product range. "No problem is the same. It might need a bigger tank, or it might be a greater flow of water, or it might be a scenario where there's more traffic in the area. Each problem is different and it's got to be handled differently. It's all about the service that you give in handling that enquiry, giving all the technical back-up that you need from the architect to the enduser, via the middle man of the contractor who is

fitting it. I think what I'm trying to stress here is that all that responsibility is taken away from the merchant; what we want is for the merchant to spot that opportunity. They're gaining a lot additional business and support from their customers while probably having to do very little work throughout the whole process." What can be done to spread that awareness throughout the merchant industry? Hilton believes getting people involved in the process is the key. "There's a lot of merchants out there that are civils oriented; they have specialist divisions and are probably a little bit more aware and can deal with these a lot better, but you've got a lot of smaller merchants that are missing a trick – their guys need encouragement to look out for these opportunities, otherwise it's a bit of a waste of resources."