

SEVERN TRENT

searchlight

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR PROPERTY PROFESSIONALS SEPTEMBER 2006



Celebrating success: our 1,000,000th order prize draw!

At Severn Trent Searches we provide high-quality, accurate search information. As owners of regional drainage and water data, we've a proven track record for delivering reliable CON29DW reports, fast. We have a comprehensive range of services on offer, compiled by some of the country's foremost search providers, including coal mining, local authority, chancel repair liability, environmental and planning searches.

Since we launched in 2000, we've gone from strength to strength. We're well established and our extensive experience means we're very aware of the issues involved in the buying and selling process. We're always working to bring you new and innovative services, and we've

recently launched a new website with full product information, sample reports and news updates. We've also got a dedicated enquiry team on hand to give you all the advice and support you need. There are extra benefits for account customers too, including online ordering, faster responses, electronic return of reports and monthly billing. This all means you can rely on us to carry out searches for you.

In a few weeks' time, we'll be taking our 1,000,000th order for a CON29DW drainage and water search. To celebrate, we're giving away the following prizes:

- Free holiday vouchers worth £1,000 to one lucky customer who places an order for a CON29DW on the same day we receive our 1,000,000th CON29DW order (the names of customers who place CON29DW orders that day will be entered into a prize draw)
- Additional free holiday vouchers worth £1,000 for the customer who commissioned the winning search

*Terms and conditions apply. See reverse.

We've recently reached order reference 10280000. The 1,000,000th report will be order reference 10295851. Check our countdown at www.severntrentsearches.com or check the customer reference number on each search report you receive to see how close we are to the 1,000,000th order number.

Like to place an order right now? Call us on 0115 962 7269, email searches@severntrent.co.uk or visit www.severntrentsearches.com to download a searches order application form.

***Prize draw terms and conditions:** (1) The winner will be the first qualifying entry drawn at random after the draw closes on the day the 1,000,000th CON29DW order is received by Severn Trent Searches. (2) If the winning entrant is acting on behalf of a client then the additional £1,000 worth of free holiday vouchers will be passed to the client who commissioned the winning search. (3) If the winning entrant enters the prize draw in accordance with clause (7) then the additional £1,000 worth of free holiday vouchers can be given to any individual nominated by the winner. (4) The 1,000,000th CON29DW Severn Trent Searches (SAP) reference number will be 10295851. (5) No cash or prize alternative is available. (6) Employees of Severn Trent Water Limited or any affiliated company or anyone connected with Severn Trent Searches and their families and households are excluded from participation. (7) No purchase necessary. The draw is open to all UK residents aged 18 or over. The right to enter does not depend on ordering a search with Severn Trent Searches. You can also enter simply by sending your name, address and age in block capitals on either a plain piece of paper to Severn Trent Searches 1,000,000th order prize draw, PO Box 6187, Nottingham, NG5 1LE or via email to searches@severntrent.co.uk. To qualify the entry must be received by Severn Trent Searches on the same day the 1,000,000th CON29DW search order is placed. (8) All entries are governed by these terms and conditions. (9) The decision of the manager of Severn Trent Searches is final in all matters relating to the prize draw. (10) The name of the winner will be available one month after the 1,000,000th CON29DW order is placed. (11) The winner will consent to Severn Trent Searches using their names for the purposes of announcing the winner and related promotional purposes. (12) The winners do not have to participate in any post-event publicity in order to collect the free holiday vouchers. (13) The promoter of this prize draw is Severn Trent Searches PO Box 6187, Nottingham, NG5 1LE.

New plans for HIPs

The Government's controversial plans to introduce Home Information Packs have been stripped down and simplified. There's a revised implementation process in the pipeline, with a gradual rollout to improve the chance of success...



We've all heard about Home Information Packs (HIPs) – part of the Government's ongoing effort to simplify the process of buying and selling homes. As a result of the Housing Act 2004, sellers and agents will be responsible for having packs prepared from June 2007. By 1st November 2007, all properties on the market will require a HIP, even if listed before June 2007.

The Government has released a new plan to phase the introduction of HIPs. The top priority is to provide Energy Performance Certificates for homes from 1st June 2007. The ratings will give homebuyers an insight into the energy efficiency of their proposed purchase as well as practical information on how to cut their future fuel bills and carbon emissions.

The Home Condition Report (HCR) element of the pack will be introduced on a voluntary, market-led basis. This will help ensure a smooth implementation with clear benefits for consumers. Mandatory introduction of HCRs is still a possibility, however the Government wants to allow a more flexible rollout that responds to consumer demand and the results of further testing. This testing will assess the cost and impact of HCRs, therefore avoiding any interference with the implementation of Energy Performance Certificates.

The packs will include a number of documents, some required and some authorised. In all cases, advertising material is strictly prohibited from the HIP contents.

Required documents include:

- HIP index
- Sale statement
- Evidence of title or information related to unregistered land
- Common hold or leasehold information where relevant
- Copy of new homes warranty where relevant
- Local searches
- EPC

Authorised documents include:

- A home condition report (HCR)
- Home contents and home-use forms
- Other searches, including environmental and liabilities to repair or maintain buildings

Severn Trent Searches are preparing to offer HIPs to estate agents and solicitors mainly in the Severn Trent Water region. As we already provide a wide range of searches to the legal profession, we can guarantee expert advice based on extensive local knowledge. We'll also be working closely with our customers to deliver the packs in the format that's best suited to them.

If you'd like to find out more about Home Information Packs or what Severn Trent Searches could offer your firm, just call 0115 962 7269 or visit us at www.severntrentsearches.com.

HIPs: What happens next?

On 18th July 2006 the Government announced that Home Condition Reports were no longer to be a mandatory element of the Home Information Pack. Severn Trent Searches' takes a look at the aftermath.

The Government's decision to make the Home Condition Report (HCR) voluntary has caused mixed reactions throughout the industry, with opinions divided and emotion running high.

Rightmove almost instantly pulled the plug on their £7 million Home Information Pack business, arguing that 'HIP provision will be better suited to smaller-scale local solutions involving agents and their existing solicitor contacts'.

Other potential HIP providers have remained more bullish, insisting that voluntary HCRs will prove

popular with consumers. As The Association of Home Information Pack Providers commented, 'there is a real will to demonstrate that Home Condition Reports can be made to work on a voluntary basis'.

Home Information Packs are still due to come in on June 1st 2007. The 'required' elements of the pack remain the same minus the now voluntary HCR. These elements still need to be available at the point of marketing (although the 14-day period before a property could be marketed without a HIP will not be enforced in the dry run, and many are assuming this will still be the case come June 1st). One of these elements is the much-talked-about Energy Performance Certificate (EPC).

Baroness Andrews, in the House of Lords, stated that there would be a significant employment opportunity for Home Inspectors because 'energy performance certificates will need to be produced by properly trained inspectors'. The DCLG is estimating that between 2,500 and 4,500 'properly trained inspectors' will be needed to produce EPCs. And the omission of the word

'home' from both of these statements implies that this will be an opportunity for the likes of big utility companies to enter the foray.

So, what of the other 'required' elements? Now the HCR is voluntary the focus will shift significantly towards the searches industry. In terms of what's required from search providers very little has changed: the customer will still require fast, accurate, low-cost searches. For some local authorities this will raise a number of challenges to be met prior to implementation, not least in the ramifications of the OFT report into the searches industry.

Clearly the Government will be busy amending the Home Information Pack regulations over the next couple of months, and will also be under a lot of pressure to deliver its promise to 'invest resources in promoting and developing voluntary take up' of HCRs. There are too many large firms with a vested interest in the success of HCRs for them to disappear without a fight.