

# Aquafacts 17

## Buying a domestic water softener on the internet – a word of caution

Most people would agree that it is difficult for a retail outlet to compete with internet prices. In most cases the argument 'for', is much stronger than the argument 'against'.

That is until you come to buy a product that is heavily dependent upon the support of a local supplier. Most people would not buy replacement windows or doors on the web as a site survey is necessary. A first class installation is part of the package, as well as a good after-care service. Expected long guarantees require the immediate response of a local company. The final price therefore does not just reflect the cost of the product, but includes all the professional advice and assistance that is required before, during and after purchase.

Although it is not immediately realised, buying a water softener falls into a similar category. It may be viewed, by many, as another domestic appliance, but that is where the similarity ends. It is classified as a home improvement product. To put one in your residence can require specialist skills, which is why you cannot buy a water softener in a domestic appliance superstore. We would always recommend purchase from a water treatment specialist like ourselves.

A site survey is required to check water pressure, location and to review the fitting implications (this does not preclude DIY). A water treatment specialist offers installation and commissioning, as part of the sales package, as well as after-care services such as salt deliveries. Long guarantees compliment the attention to detail and reflect the confidence that suppliers have in their products.

It is possible to buy water softeners cheaply on the internet, much to the dismay of many of us in the industry. As support services are generally not offered, prices (and guarantees) are much

lower. A reduced price however can dominate potential buyers thinking. It makes what is being offered locally seem unfairly inflated. As explained, this is not the case.

There are other pitfalls as the following case study shows:

## Case study – what seemed straightforward certainly wasn't

Mrs Smith (name changed), of Basingstoke, contacted Aqua-Nouveau to buy a KINETICO water softener. On hearing the price Mrs Smith retorted that she could buy cheaper on the web. We later heard she ordered the softener from a supplier, in East Anglia. It duly arrived three days later. Mrs Smith was surprised she struggled to find a plumber that would install it for her. However, her persistence led to an installation three and a half weeks later. It all went well.

However, several days later doubts arose as the water was still hard. She telephoned the plumber. 'I install them but I don't know much about them', was his response. 'I suggest you contact KINETICO'. A very unhappy Mrs Smith phoned KINETICO's head office and they referred the call to us as the local dealer.

Our response was sympathetic but we had to make it clear that we did not supply the machine, or install it and therefore we had no legal obligation to fix it. If we touched it we would automatically have to take on the guarantee. We were not prepared to do this. We also had no idea how it was set up. We could be letting ourselves into a can of worms. We suggested she contact the company she bought it from. If we visited we would have to make a call out charge. Mrs Smith firmly refused to pay any money whatsoever and the phone call came to an abrupt end.

A short time later a sheepish Mrs Smith was back on the phone. She had contacted the company in

East Anglia. They politely told her they had no engineers on the road and that the product was covered by a *12 month return to base only guarantee*, as stated in their on-line terms and conditions. 'How am I supposed to disconnect a softener, which is full of salt and water and send it back to Norfolk...?', she asked us bluntly.

The situation was eventually resolved amicably. We agreed to send an engineer to look at the softener. We found a fault. This could have been caused by mishandling during the initial delivery. We also found the plumbers drain connection did not meet bylaw requirements. We did what was necessary and recommissioned the softener. It is now working satisfactorily. The only downside was the final bill. If Mrs Smith had purchased from us in the first place it would have cost her less, she would have benefited from a longer guarantee and there would have been no hassle.

### Conclusion

As you may have already gathered Aqua-Nouveau is most uncomfortable about water softeners being sold on the web. We believe low prices undermine the true value of products like KINETICO. A water softener is not an appliance but a home improvement. Therefore we must repeat that our prices do not just reflect the cost of the product, but include all the professional advice and assistance that is required along the way - before, during and after purchase.

As a KINETICO dealer we employ all our own engineers and support staff. We do not use contracted labour. We offer free site surveys and advice regardless of whether we install or supply for DIY. Our minimum guarantee is two years parts and labour. We can guarantee labour for five years and warranty parts for ten years. This depends on the product and choice of options. A sixty day money back guarantee of satisfaction is standard practice. For more information please contact us on the telephone number below.

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