

Schedule of Maintenance – Septic Tank based Systems

With the introduction of the Building Act 2016 maintenance requirements are now required for all classes of building including dwellings.

It is now a requirement under the Building Regulations that the responsible owner must maintain the building and a maintainable plumbing installation in accordance with, amongst other things, a Schedule of Maintenance.

Matters that are required to be maintained may include:

- Having the septic tank desludged (cleaned out) every three years.
- If a filter has been installed in the outlet of the septic tank, inspecting it at least every 6-12 months and having it cleaned as required. Information Sheet “Guide to Septic Tank Filter Maintenance” is available from Council on request.
- If installed, having any pump associated with the system checked annually to ensure that it is operating correctly.
- If installed, having the grease trap cleaned out annually.
- Keeping the surface water diversion drains upslope of, and around the disposal area clean to reduce infiltration and absorption of rainwater into trenches, beds or irrigation areas.
- Ensuring that you don’t build or place any materials such as paving etc. over the land application area or use it for storing materials.
- Maintaining the land application area by keeping the vegetation on it relatively short.
- Ensuring the system is protected from damage from vehicles, livestock and wildlife.
- Keeping the vent of the septic tank exposed.
- Ensuring that all the tank and system opening are accessible at finished ground surface level.

Why this maintenance is important?

Basic maintenance is necessary and important to ensure that this valuable asset works properly and efficiently and you get the maximum sustainable life out of it.

Just as you wouldn’t wait until your car breaks down or has problems before you get it fixed, you shouldn’t wait until your wastewater system fails or has problems before doing something about it.

However, unlike a car that can be fixed, when a wastewater system fails, in many instances it needs to be replaced. This is not only expensive, somewhere in the order of \$10,000 - \$20,000, it is very disruptive to your life and property and a new area in which to install the new land application area may be needed.

Some routine and regular maintenance is therefore a small cost, somewhere in the order of \$2 per week for desludging, to get the maximum life out of your system and protect a major asset of your property.

One question Council is often asked is why it is required that the septic tank be desludged every 3 years.

Desludging the septic tank routinely prevents solid material and sludge from migrating to the sub-soil drainage system (trenches, beds or whatever the land application area is) to which the septic tank discharges. If this material gets into the sub-soil drainage system it can reduce the life of the sub-soil drainage system meaning that it may need to be replaced sooner.

How often a septic tank actually needs to be desludged is based on a number of variable factors including the number of people using the system, diet and climate.

It is also recommended that in cold climates more frequent desludging may be needed due to diminished microbiological activity resulting in the slower breakdown of sludge.

Many jurisdictions suggest a desludging frequency of 3 – 5 years but the only way to properly assess whether it does need doing is, after 3 years, having it assessed annually by a plumber to determine the sludge build up in the tank and this would cost in the order of \$100.

A conservative desludging period of 3 years was determined to best suit the need for scheduled desludging in Tasmania's cooler climate.

As Council now has to administer the maintenance schedules and has a responsibility, along with owners, to ensure that systems are maintained, it is important that matters such as desludging of septic tanks, pump maintenance and grease trap maintenance is carried out in an ordered, systematic and managed manner. Council has therefore set-up systems to ensure that this important regular maintenance occurs through a reminder process.

You will receive a reminder letter when the applicable routine maintenance is due. Under the Building Act 2016 you are required to ensure that this maintenance occurs.

For further information or advice please contact Council's Environmental Health Services on 6217 9570.