



Looking After Your Waste Water Management System

A failing waste water management system can be a serious health and environmental hazard and can lead to:

- Spread of infectious diseases.
- Breeding of mosquitoes and attraction of flies and rodents.
- Nuisances and unpleasant odours.
- Pollution of waterways, beaches, streams and shellfish beds.
- Contamination of bores, wells and groundwater.
- Changes in the local ecology.

There are numerous types of wastewater management systems available. Depending on the design of the system, waste from your toilet, shower and sinks may go into a septic system and then into some type of disposal (management) system. There are many things you can do to help extend the life of your wastewater management system and prevent the need for costly repairs.

Reduce the sludge building up in the septic tank by:

- ✓ Scraping all dishes to remove fats, grease *etc.* before washing.
- ✓ Keeping all possible solids out of the system.



And...

- ✗ Don't use garbage grinders.
- ✗ Don't put sanitary napkins, disposable nappies and other hygiene products into the system.

Bacteria exist in your septic tank to help the break down of solids

Keep the bacteria in your septic tank healthy by:

- ✓ Using biodegradable soaps.
- ✓ Using low-phosphorus and low-sodium detergents. Go to <http://www.lanfaxlabs.com.au> for information about the composition of laundry detergents.
- ✓ Using detergents in recommended quantities.

And...

- ✗ Do not use powerful bleaches, whiteners, nappy soakers, spot removers and disinfectants.
- ✗ Do not use water bluing substances in the toilet as these are poisonous to the beneficial bacteria in waste water systems.
- ✗ Do not put chemicals or paint down the drain.

Your system will last longer if you don't overload it.

- ✓ Install water-conservation fittings.
- ✓ Take shorter showers instead of baths.
- ✓ Only wash clothes when there is a full load.
- ✓ Only use the dishwasher when there is a full load.

And...

- ✗ Don't do all the washing on one day.
- ✗ Don't run the dishwasher at the same time as the washing machine.

Maintenance is important

- The septic tank should be desludged (cleaned out) every three years.
- If a filter has been installed in the outlet of the septic tank, inspect it at least every year and have it cleaned as required. Information Sheet "Guide to Septic Tank Filter Maintenance" is available from Council on request.
- Keep 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.
- Deep rooting trees or shrubs should not be grown over absorption trenches or pipes.
- The system must be protected from vehicles and livestock.
- Have the grease trap cleaned out regularly.
- Keep the vent and access covers of the septic tank exposed.

Ensuring that your waste water management system, including the septic tank, is looked after and some routine, but simple maintenance is performed, will mean that it will function for many years without causing problems. It is also a small cost to pay to protect what can cost in excess of \$10,000 to repair or replace.

You may have a manual distribution system

These systems direct the wastewater to different trenches. The valves in the distribution system should be periodically changed, e.g. monthly or seasonally. To find out if your system has one of these systems contact Council.

Special notes for irrigation areas

- Surface irrigation areas are not play areas for children and access should be restricted.
- Appropriate warning signs should be posted.
- It is important that the wastewater is evenly distributed over the irrigation area to prevent any one area becoming water logged.
- Mulched irrigation areas need to be kept relatively free of weeds.
- On surface irrigation areas it is important to maintain a good layer of mulch and ensure that there are sufficient suitable plants to aid in the take up of the wastewater.
- Grassed sub-surface irrigation areas should be mown regularly.
- Operation and maintenance advice can be obtained from the installer.



You'll know when something is wrong if:

- The disposal area is wet and soggy with waste water pooling on the surface of the ground.
- There is a smell of 'sewage' near the septic tank or disposal area.
- The drains and toilets don't run properly.
- The grease trap is full or blocked.



If you notice that there is a problem with your waste water system, please contact a plumber. They may be able to advise you on the best way to rectify the problem. Please keep in mind that if you need to put in or modify your system you must lodge an application with Council to do so.

Some useful web sites:

- <http://septictankinfo.com/>
- http://www.swopnet.com/engr/Septic_Tanks/index.html

For further information or advice please contact Council's Environmental Health Services on 6245-8614.