

# Frequently asked questions – On-Site Sewage Management



1) *Why do I need to lodge to change/install an on-site sewage management system?*

A section 68 application under the Local Government Act 1993 is required to be lodged to install or alter any on-site sewage management system.

The application shall include a site plan showing the location of effluent disposal areas and demonstrate the amount of suitable land available. The site plan shall include the location of the sewage management system, any proposed buildings and all required buffer distances to buildings, property boundaries, driveways, swimming pools, paved areas, market gardens (where applicable) and drainage depressions, dams, and water courses. The application shall include floor plans for all dwellings/sheds to be connected to the on-site sewage management system. NOTE: A study shall be classified as an additional potential bedroom. An application may require a wastewater report – see Question 3.

2) *What are the required buffer distances?*

Buffer distances can be found in Council’s ‘On-site Sewage Management and Greywater Re-use Policy 2021, Table 5.8’

### Buffer Distances

5.8 The following buffer distances apply to all categories unless otherwise specified:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>All land application Systems</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>100 metres to permanent surface waters (e.g. river, streams lakes etc.)</li> <li>250 metres to domestic groundwater well</li> <li>40 metres to other waters (e.g. farm dams, intermittent waterways &amp; drainage channels etc.)</li> </ul> |
| <b>AWTS surface spray irrigation</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6 metres if area up-gradient &amp; 3 metres if area down-gradient of driveways &amp; property boundaries</li> <li>15 metres to dwellings</li> <li>3 metres to paths &amp; walkways</li> <li>6 metres to swimming pools</li> </ul>            |
| <b>AWTS surface drip &amp; trickle irrigation</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6 metres if area up-gradient &amp; 3 metres if area down gradient of swimming pools, property boundaries, driveways &amp; buildings</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Subsurface irrigation</b>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6 metres if area up-gradient &amp; 3 metres if area down-gradient of swimming pools, property boundaries, driveways &amp; buildings</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Absorption systems</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12 metres if area up-gradient &amp; 6 metres if area down-gradient of property boundary</li> <li>6 metres if area up-gradient &amp; 3 metres if area down-gradient of swimming pools, driveways &amp; buildings.</li> </ul>                  |
| <b>Market Gardens</b>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AWTS only permitted with 20 metres if area is up-gradient &amp; 10 metres if area is down-gradient of any market garden</li> </ul>   |

## Other buffer distances

### Septic Tanks and Treatment Tanks

- i. A minimum buffer distance of 2.5 metres shall be provided between any septic and treatment tank(s) and any property boundary.
- ii. The septic and or treatment tanks must be located a minimum of 2.5 metres from any dwelling, habitable building or other structure NOTE: This figure is based on the assumption that the installation will be in clay soils where the angle of repose is 45 degrees, i.e. the base of the tank is equal to the distance to the base of the footings of the dwelling.
- iii. The location of the tank(s) is required to comply with the buffer distances as detailed in s5.8 of this policy, for permanent surface waters, groundwater wells and other waters.
- iv. The location of the tank(s) shall be located a minimum of 6 metres down slope of any in-ground water storage tank.

### 3) *When would a waste water report be required?*

See categories and requirements from s5.4, 5.5 and 5.6 in Council's 'On-site Sewage Management and Grey-water re-use policy'.

#### 5.4 Category 1 - Lots with 1500 m<sup>2</sup> or more of suitable effluent disposal area:

- 5.4.1 Surface irrigation with a movable line is permissible.
- 5.4.2 Effluent disposal areas of this size are expected to be able to satisfactorily cope with domestic wastewater loads of up to 10 persons.
- 5.4.3 Only a minimum site assessment is required for sites in this category where an Aerated Wastewater Treatment System (AWTS) is proposed. A more detailed report may be requested by Council if considered necessary.

A detailed wastewater report prepared by a suitably qualified and experienced wastewater consultant outlining how the system will comply with the relevant legislation and guidelines is required if:

- 5.4.4 The land is located within the Sydney Drinking Water Catchment.
- 5.4.5 Sub-soil disposal systems (i.e. trenches, beds, mounds, etc.) are proposed.
- 5.4.6 Alternate systems such as biological filter systems, grey water treatment systems, or wet and waterless composting system are proposed.
- 5.4.7 The land is located on a steep slope (more than 10%).

**5.5 Category 2 - Lots with between 300 m<sup>2</sup> and 1500 m<sup>2</sup> of suitable effluent disposal area:**

5.5.1 A detailed wastewater report prepared by a suitably qualified and experienced wastewater consultant detailing how the system will comply with the relevant legislation and guidelines must be submitted.

5.5.2 A variety of land application methods may be permissible (depending on available space and soil type) and must be designed and installed in accordance with the latest version of AS/NZS 1547:2012 On-site domestic wastewater management, with the exception that the design daily flow calculations, based on the number of potential bedrooms in a dwelling are in accordance with s5.7 of this policy. Where possible, 100% reserve area should be provided for trench and bed disposal systems. Each application will be assessed on its own merits and the potential impact of the proposed system on human health and the environment.

5.5.3 Sub-soil (trenches and beds) will not be permitted in Category 1 or 2 soils (Gravel, sand and sandy loam), or Category 6 soils (medium to heavy clay).

**5.6 Category 3 - Lots with less than 300 m<sup>2</sup> of suitable effluent disposal area:**

5.6.1 Only pump-out systems are permissible.

5.6.2 A grey water treatment system may be installed; a detailed wastewater report is required for the installation of these systems.

NOTE: Pump-out systems will not be considered as an acceptable means of wastewater disposal for new subdivisions. Sub-soil (trenches and beds), also will not be considered for sub-division applications.

*4) When do I require a NorBE assessment (Neutral or Beneficial effect on water quality)?*

When the property is located in Sydney Drinking Water Catchment – your wastewater consultant will provide this in the wastewater report.

*5) Can I install a pump out system?*

- Pump out systems are not recommended as they are expensive, difficult to maintain – reliant on an external, appropriately licensed wastewater removalist to turn up on time and empty the system, and pose a high risk to the environment. Pump out systems may be considered – only as a last resort, where there is no other option.
- Pump out systems will not be considered in new subdivision applications.

*6) Can I install a domestic septic tank/aerated wastewater treatment system on my property?*

- Domestic wastewater tanks which can be installed, must be accredited with NSW Health – the certificate of accreditation and tank specification is to accompany any s68 application.
- All domestic tanks accredited by NSW Health will only cater for 10 persons, with a maximum design flow rate of 1500L/day. Anything above this will require an alternative system, which must demonstrate that it is capable of treating the design flow.

It might be reasonable e.g. when building a granny flat to install an additional septic treatment system, where space permits.

7) *I am getting my Approval to Operate renewal every 12 months. Why?*

Certain properties have higher risks than others, and potential to impact on other properties and Catchment areas (where applicable). An Approval to Operate is current for 1, 3 or 5 years, dependent on the risk category assigned to that particular system. Risks categories are outlined in the following table:

| <b>HIGH RISK – 12 MONTH APPROVAL (1 YEAR)</b>   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Residential lots smaller than 4000m<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lots in the Sydney Drinking Water Catchment</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effluent disposal areas located within 100m of a watercourse or 40m of intermittent watercourses</li> </ul>          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Properties with a poor performance history</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Properties where sewer is available, however the property has not connected</li> </ul>                               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All pump out systems</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools, commercial and industrial development in unsewered areas</li> </ul>   |
| <b>MEDIUM RISK – 3 YEAR APPROVAL</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lots between 4000m<sup>2</sup> and 10,000m<sup>2</sup> that do not meet the criteria of 'High Risk Areas'</li> </ul> |
| <b>LOW RISK – 5 YEAR APPROVAL</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lots equal to or more than 10,000m<sup>2</sup> that do not meet the criteria of 'High Risk Areas'</li> </ul>         |
| (NOTE: 10,000M <sup>2</sup> = 1 hectare)  |

8) *How often do I need to get my septic system serviced?*

- Your Aerated Wastewater Treatment System, (secondary treatment), is required to be serviced every 3 months to ensure that it is operating in accordance with the manufacturers guidelines and complies with relevant legislation.
- A primary treatment system, (conventional septic tank – primary treatment), does not have to be serviced, however should be de-sludged every 3-5 years to ensure that it operates effectively and that sludge does not impact on the trench/bed system.

9) *Why do I have to pay an Approval to Operate fee?*

- NSW Government regulations, (Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 – subdivision 6), require every septic system to be registered with Council.
- An approval to operate sets out the basic rules and conditions that you need to follow to keep the system working well and to ensure that the performance standards comply with the requirements of the Local Government (General) Regulations 2005, subdivision 7.
- Council is able to charge fees to cover the cost of monitoring and to manage public health and environmental risks associated with septic systems, in accordance with the Local Government Act 1993 – Section 80 and Council's Fees and Charges schedule.
- Operating an on-site sewage management system without an Approval to Operate is an offence and may result in Council issuing a penalty infringement notice. Continued non-compliance may result in court action.

*It says in Section 553A Special rates and charges not payable in relation to land provided with private water supply or sewerage.*

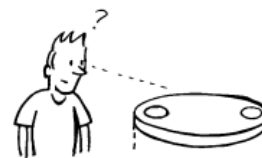
In relation to s553A, an Approval to Operate fee is not a special rate or charge in relation to:

- a) Council providing a water supply or sewer service (this would be charged if Council was the provider), or
- b) A direction under s56 of the Act. (e.g. under the Water Management Act 2000)

*How do these standards apply when we only discharge plain water?*

Wastewater effluent water still contains a certain amount of bacteria, even when treated – with the potential to cause harm to the environment if not managed appropriately. An Aerated Wastewater Treatment System provides secondary treatment – whereas Sydney Water Treatment generally provides a level of tertiary treatment or better, which can then be recycled for other uses.

## PART 2 WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



NSW Government regulations now require every septic system to be registered with the council.

This is necessary so the council can monitor and manage the overall impact of all of the septic systems in the drainage catchment. Taken together that is a lot of effluent and no-one wants to be swimming in it.

### What is registration?

SepticSafe registration is a bit like registering a car. Information about your septic system is sent to the council with an application for approval. The council issues an 'approval to operate a system of sewage management' which sets out the basic rules you need to follow to keep the system working well. The details are set out in the council's **on-site sewage management strategy** and **local approvals policy**. Both of these documents are available at your council.

A fee may be charged to help the council cover the costs of monitoring and managing public health and environmental risks associated with septic systems. People in seweraged areas already pay for these costs in their sewerage rates.

### How does council supervision work?

Local councils have to manage sewage pollution risks in a systematic way. Most councils use a simple risk classification to determine supervision levels. The higher the risk, the higher the level of supervision that may be required.

The process works like this –

- 1) Resident sends in a *SepticSafe* registration and pays a fee (if required).
  - 2) Council records the details and determines a risk classification (eg. high, medium, low)
  - 3) Council issues an operating approval which may require regular reports or site inspections.
- NB. The approval relates to the owner, not the land. When the land is sold the new owner should notify the council and obtain an approval in their name.



Source - Part 2 Easy Septic Guide