

How do I maintain my onsite wastewater system?

Treatment System Type	Maintenance Requirements
Septic Tank	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Service system every three years• Pump out every three years (if required)• Inspect and maintain effluent field (as required)
Wormfarm (no Sand Filter)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Six month, 18 month service then two year intervals• Pump out every three years (if required)• Inspect and maintain effluent field (as required)
Sand Filter (after Septic Tank or Wormfarm)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual service• Pump out septic tank every three years• Replace sand filter every 15 years (if required)• Inspect and maintain effluent field (as required)
Aerated Wastewater Treatment System (AWTS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual contract for three month servicing (quarterly)• Pump out every three years (if required)• Inspect and maintain effluent field (as required)
Mechanical Wastewater Treatment System	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual contract for six monthly servicing• Pump out every three years (if required)• Inspect and maintain effluent field (as required)
Greywater Treatment Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual service contract• Pump out every three years (if required)• Inspect and maintain effluent field (as required)
Eco-Max Cells	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual service• Pump out every three years (if required)• 15 Year replacement of amended soil unless system performance demonstrated as satisfactory• Inspect and maintain effluent field (as required)
Biolytix BF6 (Vermiculture system)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two yearly servicing• Pump out every three years (if required)• Inspect and maintain effluent field (as required)

Please remember:

Onsite wastewater systems require regular care and maintenance to ensure they function correctly.

You should know where your system is located on your property so any problems that arise can be identified and addressed quickly.

Your obligations for specific system maintenance are also stated in your permit conditions. Servicing of your onsite wastewater system must be completed by an authorised service representative. A list of service providers can be found on Council's website.

If you are unsure, please ask. Council's Environmental Health Team is here to help you.



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South Gippsland Shire Council

Onsite Wastewater Management Systems



Understanding your onsite wastewater management system and how to maintain it.



South Gippsland
Shire Council

Onsite Wastewater Systems

Domestic wastewater disposal is one of the most important environmental issues in South Gippsland. Poorly maintained onsite wastewater systems can affect public health, the environment, local waterways, drinking water, ground waters and the storm water system. South Gippsland Shire currently has approximately 8,000 onsite wastewater treatment systems installed.

What is an onsite wastewater system?

When you flush the toilet, have a shower or wash the dishes the wastewater produced must be treated. Properties that are not connected to reticulated sewerage must have their own onsite wastewater system to treat wastewater.

Onsite wastewater systems use good bacteria to break down and digest waste within the dirty water. Once treated, the effluent (treated wastewater) is dispersed onto your property, usually via an underground network of pipes. A permit to install and use an onsite wastewater system is required by Council.

Types of onsite wastewater systems

Primary Treatment Systems

Septic Tanks or Absorption Disposal

Septic tank systems are either concrete or plastic in-ground tanks where good bacteria live, digest and treat wastewater. The tank is divided into multiple chambers which help the fats and solids to separate out of the liquid. A healthy septic tank should have three layers, a layer of fats forming a scum on the surface which helps to reduce odours, a clear layer in the middle also called effluent, and a layer of solids or sludge at the bottom. Effluent is discharged to land through a series of underground trenches for disposal.

Other Systems

Worm Farms

Worm farms use live earth worms to compost organic waste as well as the wastewater generated at the property. A worm farm consists of several layers of fine soil, growing medium and geotextile fabric. The system also includes a large pump and a ventilator which emits very little odour. Effluent is discharged to land through a series of underground irrigation pipes/trenches for disposal.

Secondary Treatment Systems

Mechanical Treatment Plants

Mechanical treatment plants are also known as Aerobic Wastewater Treatment Systems (AWTS). They contain a number of different treatment compartments and use settling, air and clarification to treat wastewater. This type of system treats effluent to a higher level than septic tank systems.

Sand Filters

Sand filters are large structures filled with sand. Sand filters are usually installed in series after a septic tank system and treat wastewater to a higher standard than a septic tank alone. Sand filters allow water to filter through the sand capturing any remaining solid material and improving the quality of the effluent.

Trouble shooting your onsite wastewater system

Your onsite wastewater system may need attention if:

- **A rotten egg smell is present**
- **The ground is damp or soggy around the absorption trenches or effluent field**
- **The toilet, shower or drains are slow to clear**
- **The system's visual or audible alarm has been activated (if installed)**

Things to remember:

Do

- Do sign up with a treatment service provider to maintain your system every three months where required (secondary aerobic treatment systems).
- Do learn how your onsite wastewater system works and identify its location on your property.
- Do have your septic tank pumped out/inspected every three years (if required) to prevent sludge build up, which may clog pipes, absorption beds or trenches.
- Do have your grease trap cleaned out every three months if you have one installed.
- Do conserve water entering the system by installing water efficient fixtures and fittings.
- Do check household chemicals including cleaning products, soaps and laundry products are septic compatible so the good bacteria are not killed.

Don't

- Don't put large quantities of bleaches, disinfectants, whiteners, nappy soakers and spot removers into your onsite wastewater system.
- Don't put fats or oils down the drain.
- Don't let heavy stock (i.e. cows, horses, etc.) graze on your disposal area to prevent damage and costly repairs.
- Don't use more than the recommended amounts of detergents.
- Don't drive or park on your onsite wastewater system to prevent damage.
- Don't allow foreign materials such as nappies, condoms and feminine hygiene products to enter the onsite wastewater system.

For further information please visit Council's website www.southgippsland.vic.gov.au or contact Council's Environmental Health Team on 5662 9200