

Protecting your effluent disposal area

After effluent has been treated in a wastewater treatment system it flows into the effluent disposal area. The disposal area can consist of absorption trenches or a sub-surface irrigation system if a secondary treatment system, such as a wastewater treatment plant, has been installed. Effluent is slowly absorbed into the soil, evaporated by the sun and wind and taken up by plants. These processes assist with the neutralisation of pollutants and pathogens.

Effluent disposal areas are often in remote areas of the garden or yard and may be forgotten or neglected. Damaged or blocked trenches or irrigation lines can cause effluent to surface or pool in the backyard creating health risks to you, your family and your pets. Neglected effluent disposal areas can also cause odour problems for your household and your neighbours. Left unchecked they may ultimately require expensive repairs.

How to protect your effluent disposal area

There are a number of things you can do to protect your effluent disposal area from damage:

- Do not allow vehicles to park or drive over any part of the system as pipes can be broken and the soil compacted reducing absorption of effluent into the soil
- Keep children, pets and stock animals away from the disposal area
- Divert storm water and surface water away from the disposal area as they can contribute to flooding
- Keep the disposal area mown and remove the cuttings to encourage grass growth
- Do not use sprinklers or hoses to soak or flood the disposal area
- Do not cover the disposal area with concrete, pavers or any other construction including buildings
- Do not spread extra soil or other materials, such as fill, on the disposal area as this will reduce effective absorption of effluent into the soil
- Do not plant large trees or shrubs in the disposal area as roots can invade and clog trenches. Shade from large trees can also reduce the effectiveness of the absorption area. Large trees should be planted a minimum of 20m from the effluent disposal area and small, water loving trees and shrubs planted no closer than 5m down-slope
- Plant your effluent disposal area with shallow rooting grasses and/or shrubs which are water tolerant and suitable for local conditions ---->
- Shallow rooted plants along the margins of effluent disposal areas can assist with water uptake however, only grass should be grown directly over absorption trenches.

Suggested native plants for effluent disposal areas

Grasses, rushes and sedges

(can be planted on top of drainage)

- Purple Sheath Tussock Grass (*Poa ensiformis*)
- Common Tussock Grass (*Pea labillarderi*)
- Tall Sedge (*Carex appessa*)
- Tall Sedge (*Carex fascicularis*)
- Common Spike-Rush (*Eieocharis acuta*)
- Sedges (*Juncus* species)
- Club Rush (*Isolepis* species)
- Spiny Headed Mall Rush (*Lomandra longifolia*)

Shrubs / small trees

(for planting to within two metres of any drain or drainage area)

- Hop Goodenia (*Coodenia ovata*)
- Native Broom (*Viminaria juncea*)
- Woolly Tea-Tree (*Leptospermum lanigerum*)
- Swamp Paperbark (*Melaleuca ericifolia*)
- Hazel Pomaderis (*Pomaderris aspera*)
- River Bottlebrush (*Callistemon sieberi*)

Absorption Trenches

Absorption trenches should be inspected at least once a year to ensure they are operating correctly. Check the effluent field carefully. It should not be soggy, should not smell and should not have prolific grass growth. Grass should be kept well mown and clippings removed. If the effluent field is soggy, smells or is overgrown with dense grass, there may be too much water flowing into your septic, or the trenches may be exhausted. You should call a plumber to identify the outcome and determine the best solution.

Sub-Surface Irrigation

Sub-surface irrigation effluent fields are susceptible to blockage and require regular maintenance. Irrigation lines should be checked during your regular servicing maintenance, but it is good practice to check the area yourself at least monthly. If a filter has been installed between the treatment plant and irrigation system you may need to learn how to clean the filter between your regular servicing. Refer to your systems operating manual for more information. Sub-surface irrigation should be covered with a layer of soil approximately 100-150mm deep. Pumps need to be inspected and serviced regularly.

Effluent Disposal Field Checklist

Is there any evidence of surface water or soggy ground on the effluent disposal area (e.g. after emptying the bath?)	YES	NO
Is the effluent disposal area greener than others?	YES	NO
Is there evidence of stormwater intrusion?	YES	NO
Is there any indication that water on the surface of the effluent field is effluent?	YES	NO
Is there evidence of vehicle, human or animal traffic over the trench/bed area?	YES	NO
Is there evidence of protective measures to prevent trench/bed damage (e.g. shrubs, fencing?)	YES	NO
Is a good vegetation cover established over the trench/bed surface?	YES	NO
Does the trench/bed have good exposure to wind and sun?	YES	NO
Are the inspection ports clear (i.e. no standing water suggesting trench flooding) and in good condition?	YES	NO
Is the dosing siphon or splitter box working properly and not blocked or clogged?	YES	NO
Has the system been pumped out (desludged) in the past 3 years?	YES	NO
Has the outlet filter been cleaned by way of hosing the filter off?	YES	NO

Where the answer to any of the questions above is 'yes' your effluent disposal field may need attention to prevent damage of your wastewater system. For further information, please contact Council's Wastewater Compliance Officer on 5662 9200 or visit Council's website <http://www.southgippsland.vic.gov.au/wastewater>