

Maintaining Your Septic System

Properties that are not serviced by sewer usually depend on septic systems to treat and dispose of wastewater. Septic systems represent a significant financial investment. If cared for properly, a well-designed, installed and maintained system will provide years of reliable, low-cost service.

Failing to maintain a septic system after it has been installed can result in major financial, environmental and health impacts.

Major Repairs

Much like with any other part of your home, proper maintenance is required to ensure ongoing effective operation. If a system isn't maintained in accordance with EPA guidelines it can result in:

- Significant repairs - costing thousands of dollars
- System failure - requiring complete replacement, generally costing more than \$10,000

Environmental Pollution and Health Impacts

When a system isn't functioning properly it can discharge untreated wastewater directly to the environment.

This can result in pollution of:

- The land around your septic system – impacting the health of animals or humans that occupy the area
- Waterways – affecting sensitive ecosystems and potentially the water supply (if in a catchment area)
- Underground aquifers – reducing the usability of groundwater bores as a potable water supply

How do I know I have septic system?

For homeowners:

- If you DO NOT pay a wastewater charge on your water bill you DO have a septic system

For tenants and renters:

- Contact your landlord to confirm

How do I know my system has issues?

Common signs of a poorly operating system are:

- Bad odours
- Excessive grass growth around where the wastewater is dispersed
- Standing water or damp spots, even in dry weather where the wastewater is dispersed
- Baths and sinks very slow to drain

Tips for Effective System Operation

Reduce water use

This reduces the load placed on the system and prevents the tank from filling and drainage area from becoming saturated.

- Install water saving devices
- Have shorter showers
- Spread out operation of major water consuming devices over the week (e.g. washing machine)

Protect your effluent field

This ensures that treated wastewater leaving your system is able to freely drain into the soil.

- Don't park vehicles on the field
- Don't build structures or concrete the field
- Prevent excess water from entering the area – avoid watering
- Check before planting trees or shrubs in the area to confirm their roots are not prone to invading and clogging trenches

Control what enters the system

Systems are designed to take human waste and other easily biodegradable substances. Non-degradable or long lifetime products reduce the capacity of your septic tank and can cause blockages.

DO NOT dispose to the septic system:

- Personal hygiene products
- Baby wipes
- Fats and oils
- Food wastes.

Protect the bacteria in the system

Your septic system contains a delicate ecosystem of bacteria that help to treat your wastewater, ensuring that the water that leaves the system meets required standards.

Do the following to protect your bacteria:

- Avoid harsh chemicals, e.g. bleach
- Choose low Phosphorous detergents
- Use low sodium laundry detergents
- Select Septic Safe products wherever possible

Do I Need a Plumber to Inspect my System?

When Council issues a permit to install a septic system it includes a requirement for the owner of the property to continue to maintain system. Part of required maintenance includes having a licensed plumber:

- Inspect the main septic tank of the system (usually every three years)
- Inspect any secondary treatment systems, if applicable (usually annually)
- Provide you with a report to submit to Council confirming that the inspection has taken place and any necessary works undertaken.

Contact Us:

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