

TOWARDS BETTER ONSITE WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT IN VICTORIA - COMMUNITY EDUCATION SERIES

FACT SHEET 10: LAND OWNERS – CONSIDERING INSTALLING OR ALTERING AN ONSITE DOMESTIC WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

This fact sheet provides an overview of the processes associated with the approval and installation of septic systems and AWTS for domestic properties. This information has been designed to assist a home owner looking to install a new system or alter an existing system on their properties. (Please check with your local Environmental Health Officer (EHO) to ensure you get all the requirements for your area.)

10.1 LAND OWNERS GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES:

- To ensure the onsite wastewater management system is functioning correctly and all wastewater is being adequately contained within the bounds of the property;
- To ensure repairs are completed promptly when the wastewater system is not functioning correctly;
- To ensure that the system is well monitored and maintained. This involves inspecting the system regularly;
- To arrange for the wastewater system to be de-sludged at least every 3 to 5 years, depending on use;
- To ensure that if the wastewater system is an AWTS it is serviced quarterly by a qualified service agent; and
- To obtain council approval for the installation, repair or alteration of a septic system or AWTS as required.

10.2 LOOKING TO INSTALL OR ALTER AN ONSITE DOMESTIC WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM:

The septic tank or Aerated Wastewater Treatment System needs to be installed away from the dwelling to ensure it does not interfere with the integrity of the house structure and is allowed ongoing access (usually at least 2 metres from a house or other building).

Soil types play a significant role in the successful operation of a domestic wastewater management system. The ability of the soil to accept and further treat wastewater will influence the size of the disposal field required and the way in which the disposal system is constructed. (Please consult with your local EHO for advice on specific local requirements).

In addition to the disposal area that is or will be used to dispose of your wastewater there needs to be another equal sized area of land on your property set aside for a reserve disposal area. Your trench or irrigation system for your wastewater disposal must be located in an area that:

- is permanently set aside only for wastewater disposal;
- is not subject to vehicle traffic or stock;
- meets the Victorian Environment Protection Authority (EPA) setback distances from buildings, other allotments, services, surface waters such as creeks and dams; and bores;
- has adequate sun exposure to assist with evaporation of the wastewater;
- is far enough away from deep rooted plants that can infiltrate and damage the disposal system. Support shallow rooted plants such as common grass should be planted instead;
- has just enough slope in the land to allow for the wastewater to be gravity fed from the septic tank to the disposal field. If there is insufficient fall then a pump may be needed to pump the wastewater;
- is not subject to flooding or pooling surface water;
- is away from areas with groundwater close to the surface of the ground (1.5m from the trench base);
- is away from areas with a shallow depth to hard rock; and
- contained within a property that has a single title.

– The location of the disposal fields to meet all setback distances to buildings, boundaries, services and water ways as specified in current EPA code of practice (ask your local EHOs).

10.3 OTHER HELPFUL DOMESTIC WASTEWATER FACT SHEETS:

If you are considering a conventional septic tank then you should also read Fact Sheet 1: Conventional Septic Tanks and Fact Sheet 6: Common Disposal Methods (Primary Treatment). If you are considering an aerated wastewater treatment system then reading Fact Sheet 2: Aerated Wastewater Treatment Systems and Fact Sheet 7: Common Disposal Methods (Secondary Treatment System) could be helpful.

10.4 SYSTEMS APPROVED FOR USE IN VICTORIA:

Onsite wastewater management systems (e.g. conventional septic tank systems, a range of package treatment plants, and alternative wastewater management systems) that can be installed in Victoria must have a current Certificate of Approval issued by the EPA. Wastewater management systems with a current Certificate of Approval will involve the simplest process when applying for permission to install a system. The manufacturer or their representative should be able to give you a copy of this certificate or you can visit the EPA website and review approved systems for yourself. The website address is www.epa.vic.gov.au/water/wastewater/onsite.asp.

10.5 ROLE OF YOUR LOCAL COUNCIL AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS:

In terms of onsite wastewater management, your local council is responsible for:

- Assessing applications for new installations, and repairs or alterations to existing systems;
- Maintaining a register of systems within the local government area;
- Monitoring and assisting to limit the potential cumulative impacts of sewage pollution;
- Providing basic advice to system owners who need assistance in repairing or maintaining their systems;
- Assessing land development proposals (e.g. new subdivisions in unsewered areas); and
- Developing domestic wastewater management plans that provide a strategic framework for managing domestic wastewater within that local authority area.

10.6 ROLE OF THE LICENSED PLUMBING PRACTITIONER:

- To liaise with the local environmental health practitioner with regard to the installation of a new system, or the repair or alteration of an existing system;
- To assist in submitting applications to install, repair or alter any domestic wastewater system;
- Share any information provided by the local environmental health officer (EHO) in relation to requirements, site inspections and any other relevant information associated with your system and the work being undertaken;
- To provide technical advice when selecting an appropriate site and designing wastewater system Specific to your needs; and
- Assist with information about the operation and maintenance of your system.

10.7 ROLE OF THE PLUMBING INDUSTRY COMMISSION (PIC):

The PIC is important to the work related to the installation, repair or alternation to your domestic wastewater system by:

- Licensing plumbing practitioners who do the work on your domestic wastewater system;
- Providing the mechanism for plumbing practitioners to self-certify their work by issuing Compliance Certificates. The Compliance Certificate certifies that the plumbing work complies with all relevant regulatory requirements and provides insurance coverage for the work for up to six years; and
- Conducting audits and inspections of a percentage of work undertaken to ensure plumbing work undertaken meets the high standard required to ensure consumer safety. The PIC can also follow up with any legal action and rehabilitation work as required.

10.8 COMPARISON BETWEEN CONVENTIONAL SEPTIC TANKS AND AERATED WASTEWATER TREATMENT SYSTEMS:

CONVENTIONAL SEPTIC SYSTEM	AERATED WASTEWATER TREATMENT SYSTEM
Generally do not require power, unless the effluent needs to be pumped	Requires a continual supply of power.
Limited maintenance – de-sludging is required every 3-5 years, depending on use.	Requires regular maintenance – must be serviced once every 3 months, an annual water sample test is required and de-sludging every 3-5 years depending on use.
A full list of approved conventional septic and secondary treatment systems can be found on the Environment Protection Authority website at http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/your-environment/water/onsite-wastewater	
It is important to note that secondary treatment systems are likely to be the best option on properties with environmentally sensitive features such as creeks and dams or where there is limited area available for disposal areas.	

Please Note: There are other system types available for onsite wastewater management. Please consult the EPA website for a list of approved systems

10.9 THE BASIC APPROVAL PROCESS:

Below is the basic process to follow when installing, repairing or altering a domestic wastewater system: You need to apply to your local council for a Permit to Install or Alter. This application needs to include the following:

- Details of the type of system and effluent disposal method;
- A completed copy of the relevant application forms available from your local council;
- Plans and specifications showing:
 - The location of the house on the property;
 - Exact location of all plumbing fixtures and fittings;
 - Location of and distance to all additional buildings, proposed buildings, swimming pool, water tanks, driveways, excavations, stormwater drains, water pipes, easement drains, streams, dams and other water ways;
 - Fall of the land in the vicinity of the disposal area;
 - Position of the package treatment plant or septic tank and the effluent disposal area.
- An EHO will then conduct a thorough inspection of the property prior to issuing the Permit to Install. This is to confirm all the details in the application;
- Once satisfied, the EHO will then issue you with the Permit to Install/Alter;
- This permit will contain important conditions that are legally binding and need to be followed in order for your system to receive final approval (or a Permit to Use). You should familiarise yourself with these conditions;
- Most councils undertake progress inspections. The main progress inspection will be undertaken before the trenches are back filled, but once the base aggregate has been laid and pipes are in place. The local EHO needs to be contacted when the job has progressed to this point so that the installed, but uncovered work, can be inspected; and
- When all the work is completed, the EHO needs to be contacted to carry out a final inspection. Once satisfied that all the conditions in the Permit to Install/Alter have been met and the licensed plumbing practitioner has provided a copy of the PIC Compliance Certificate for all drainage works and any internal plumbing works, a copy of a plan of the system as it was constructed, and a commissioning certificate (AWTS only), the EHO can issue a Permit to Use the wastewater system.

10.10 WHO TO CONTACT:

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