

# TOWARDS BETTER ONSITE WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT IN VICTORIA - COMMUNITY EDUCATION SERIES

## FACT SHEET 13: PURCHASING AN ESTABLISHED DWELLING IN THE GANNAWARRA SHIRE COUNCIL AREA

This information will be of interest if you are looking at purchasing an established dwelling within the Gannawarra Shire. The property that you purchase will either be in a township serviced by a reticulated sewer system or will have its own waste water system. We ask that you carefully read the information contained within this fact sheet, it could save you money in the long run.

### 13.1 WASTE WATER INFORMATION FOR ESTABLISHED DWELLINGS IN GANNAWARRA SHIRE

If you are considering buying an established dwelling in Gannawarra Shire, we ask that you take a few moments to read this information sheet.

Homes in Gannawarra Shire are serviced either by a reticulated sewerage system or by their own on-site wastewater disposal system.

### 13.2 BUYING IN SEWERED TOWNSHIPS

When considering the purchase of a property in a sewer town, ask the real estate agent or current owner if the property is connect to the sewer.

If the answer is YES, that's great news and one less thing for you to worry about when making your decision.

If the answer is NO, you have an issue to consider. All properties with the sewer area should be connected. We suggest you factor in the cost of connection when negotiation your purchase price and have the job done as soon as you take ownership.

How much does it cost? Unfortunately, there is no quick and easy answer to that question, as many factors will come into play. You will receive a bill from the Water Authority for the connection, plus another from your plumber.

A word of warning if the house is within the sewer area and not connected the property will be receiving a service fee from Coliban Water merely for making the service available.

### 13.3 BUYING IN UNSEWERED AREAS

Dwelling located on the edge of sewer towns, in small hamlets and in remote areas are serviced by their own on-site waste water disposal systems.

You need to be aware when purchasing a property that is serviced by an on-site waste water system that small changes can make a big difference to the way the on-site waste water system operates. In fact they can result in a system that has been working for previous owner failing on you.

That's why it's important prospective buyers understand how waste water disposal occurs on the property they are considering purchasing.

Here is a checklist of questions to ask the current owner or real estate agent.  
(Tick the box once you have asked the question)

**What type of waste water system does the property have?**

There are different types of systems around the Shire, but the most common is a traditional septic tank with trenching. However, there's also a variety of other approved systems in use including composting toilets and aerated waste water treatment systems and these require regular maintenance.

**How old is the system?**

The older the system the more likely it is that it's nearing the end of its useable life. Most traditional septic systems will operate effectively for around 25-30 years, this of course varies greatly and comes back to how well the system has been looked after.

**Where is the septic tank?**

Can you see it or is it completely covered? If so, ask where it is and may save yourself hours of searching in the future.

**When was the system (septic tank or aerated waste water treatment system) last pumped out?**

They should be pumped out every three to five years. We recommend that you have the system pumped out once you move in and then every 3 years.

**Does all the waste water go into the septic tank or is the grey water separated?**

Separate grey water systems aren't uncommon in very old homes, but most modern homes have a combined arrangement. If the grey water is separate you need to ensure that the grey water is contained within the properties boundaries.

**Where is the disposal field?**

In general the disposal field will be trenches for traditional septic tanks and irrigation either above or below ground for aerated waste water treatment systems.

**Is the disposal field obvious, can you see it?**

**Is water ponding on the surface?**

If so, the system isn't working correctly and will require work.

**Is the disposal field water logged or saturated?**

Assuming we haven't had recent heavy rain this may be an indication that the disposal field is undersized and is struggling to cope with the amount of water that is being disposed of.

**Is water directed off the property?**

All waste water must be kept on-site – it is illegal to discharge waste water off a property. If this is occurring, you will need to carry out works to fix the problem.

**If there is an aerated waste water treatment system installed, when was it last serviced?**

In general these plants should be serviced every three months – especially if the water is disposed of above ground into drippers in your garden. Don't forget to obtain the details for the service agent from the current owner, along with any manuals and records.

**How many people have been using the system for the past few years?**

The number of people living in a house has a direct impact on the amount of waste water being generated. A system that has worked happily for years with 1 or 2 people living in the house may not cope with 4 or 5 people using it. You need to be aware of this, monitor your water usage and keep an eye on the disposal field.

**Have the previous occupants been using water saving appliances?**

Are you going to be using water saving appliances? Appliances that generate a large volume of water can cause a disposal field that is nearing the end of its life to fail.

**Is the house empty?**

If so how long has it been empty? You won't be able to tell if the on-site waste water system is operating correctly in a house that isn't being occupied. It's important to keep close eye on the system once you start using it, to ensure that it operates correctly.

#### 13.4 REASONS FOR CHECKING BEFORE PURCHASING:

Repairing a failed disposal field or blocked septic system can end up costing a lot of money. Asking questions such as these of the current owner or real estate agent can save you time and money in the future.

If the system does need work. Council has a list of plumbers, service agents and de-sludging contractors available, but remember that any work carried out will require a permit.

#### 13.5 WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

If you have never lived in a home with its own on-site waste water disposal set-up, Council has produced a number of information sheets which will help. Covering all different types of systems and how they work.

If you'd like some advice or assistance please contact Council's Environmental Health Officer. Please be aware that we cannot discuss with you anything about a property that you don't own.

#### 13.6 WHO TO CONTACT:

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(03) 5450 9333