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INTRODUCTION

If you live in or rent a house that is not connected to the mains sewer, then chances are that your property has an Onsite Sewage Management System. If this is the case, then Council regulations require you to make sure that the system is in good working order and has an Approval to Operate.

The aim of this Factsheet is to provide basic information about On-site Sewage Management Systems and guidelines to help you maintain your system effectively. You should find out what type of system you have, how it works and make sure it has Council Approval. More information about the types of systems available is provided in additional Factsheets and by contacting Council. It is the responsibility of each owner to ensure the system is working properly and does not pose any threat to community health or the local environment.

WHAT IS AN ON-SITE SEWAGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM?

An On-site Sewage Management System is made up of various components which, if properly designed, installed and maintained, allow safe treatment and disposal of wastewater from a premises, completely within the boundary of the property.

Wastewater may be classified as 'blackwater' (toilet waste only) or 'greywater' (water from showers, sinks and washing machines) or a combination of both.

There are three main processes involved in on-site sewage management:

- 1 Storage of wastewater;
- 2 Treatment of wastewater to an appropriate standard; and
- 3 Application of the treated wastewater to a dedicated area of land or regular removal from the property (pump out).

INSTALLING A NEW ON-SITE SEWAGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Council is primarily responsible for approving the installation of new On-site Sewage Management Systems, disposal and/or land application areas. The design and installation of these systems (including plumbing and drainage) should only be carried out by suitably qualified or experienced professionals. Care is needed to ensure correct design in the sizing of the treatment system and application area. Council provides advice and a "Rapid Evaluation Procedure for Onsite Sewage Management" which includes 4 stages to guide applicants through assessing site requirements to find the most suitable options. This guide can be found at:

www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/factsheets/On%20Site%20Sewer%20Management%20-%20Martens%20Final%20Rapid%20Evaluation%20Procedure.pdf

TYPES OF SYSTEMS

There are a number of treatment and disposal alternatives available but all are subject to Council Approval for each individual property. A brief description of the most common alternatives is provided in the following section and more detailed information is available in the 'On-site Sewage Management System Factsheet' series.

PUMP-OUTS

These systems provide preliminary on-site treatment and storage of wastewater in a septic tank and collection well. The treated wastewater is pumped out and transported to an off-site treatment facility.

SEPTIC TANKS

Septic tanks treat both blackwater and greywater, but they provide only limited treatment through the settling of solids and the floatation of fats and greases. Bacteria in the tank break down the solids over a period of time. Wastewater that has been treated in a septic tank can only be applied to land through an in-ground soil absorption system, as the effluent still contains contaminants that can cause health concerns if applied above ground where there is risk of contact.

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AERATED WASTEWATER TREATMENT SYSTEMS (AWTS)

Aerated Wastewater Treatment Systems (AWTS) treat all household wastewater similar to septic tanks, but are comprised of a number of compartments that treat the wastewater to a higher standard. The first is like a septic tank, but in the second compartment air is mixed with the wastewater to assist bacteria to break down the solids. A third compartment allows settling of more solids and then final disinfection is undertaken in the next chamber. Some AWTS are constructed with all the compartments in a single tank. The effluent produced may be surface or subsurface irrigated in a dedicated land application area. Regular servicing is required every 3 months to ensure the system performs effectively.

COMPOSTING TOILETS

Composting toilets collect and treat toilet waste only. When looking at this alternative, consideration must be given to managing the other wastewater sources on the property. Composting toilets are generally used together with a greywater treatment system. The compost produced by a composting toilet is usually buried on site after it fully breaks down.

BIOLOGICAL FILTER SYSTEMS

A Biological Filter System uses worms, microorganisms or beetles to break up the organic material in wastewater and produces compost-like material. It treats effluent to a higher standard than a septic tank but generally does not include disinfection like the AWTS does. This means that effluent can only be disposed of by absorption trenches.

MOUNDS

Mounds are generally used for onsite sewage management in areas that are unsuitable for conventional treatment methods. This includes properties that have high water tables, limited space available and sensitive surrounding environments.

KEEPING YOUR ON-SITE SEWAGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM OPERATING WELL

What you put down your drains and toilets has a lot to do with how your system performs. Maintenance of your system also needs to be effective and regular. The following is a guide to the types of things you should do to look after your system:

- ✓ Learn the location and layout of your On-site Sewage Management System.
- ✓ Become familiar with how your On-site Sewage Management System works and its operational and maintenance requirements.
- ✓ Keep a record of desludgings, inspections and other maintenance.
- ✓ Conservative water use around the house will reduce the amount of wastewater which is produced and needs to be treated. This will help prevent hydraulic overload.
- ✓ Don't put large quantities of bleaches, disinfectants, whiteners, chemicals, nappy soakers and spot removers into our system via the sink, washing machine or toilet.

CONCLUSION

Poorly maintained On-site Sewage Management Systems are a serious source of water pollution and may present health risks, cause odours and attract vermin and insects. By looking after your treatment system you can do your part in helping to protect the environment and the health of you, your family and the local community.

If you are considering installing an on-site wastewater treatment system, prior approval is required from Council. An *Application to Install and or Operate an Onsite Sewage Management System* Form must be submitted and approved prior to any works occurring.

Further information is available by contacting Council on 4227 7111.