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In unsewered areas, the proper onsite treatment and reuse of human wastes and household wastewater is critical in preserving the health of the public and the environment. Composting toilets have been developed as an ecologically sustainable system of waste treatment which can achieve this at the household level.

There are two main types of composting toilets available in New South Wales, dry composting toilets and wet composting toilets. They rely on the action of microorganisms in an aerobic environment to break down the waste material into a compost product.

Dry composting toilets function with a no flush toilet pedestal or with moisture from a cistern. Toilet waste passes from the pan down the chute and into a chamber similar in size to a conventional septic tank. All faecal matter and other compostable matter produced such as toilet paper is broken down into compost by natural decomposing organisms. When fully broken down, the compost may be used in gardens but must be buried to a depth of 150 mm and covered. A composting toilet's performance can be significantly affected by the climatic conditions, particularly in cold climates where cold temperatures slow the composting process.

Composting toilets have a fan connected to a vent pipe which produces negative air pressure within the composting chamber. The fan aims to draw odours away from the toilet pan and evaporate excess liquid from the composting chamber in dry composting toilets.

However, these systems only treat toilet wastes and all other liquid wastes from the shower, kitchen and laundry must be disposed of via a separate grey water system. These systems discharge to subsurface absorption trenches or evapotranspiration areas.

Composting toilets are generally used in conjunction with a greywater system.

Most composting toilets are designed to sit under the dwelling, so they are not suited to slab on-ground homes. They also require a ventilation system to manage odours and help the composting process. Wet composting systems are more adaptable to various types of dwellings as the entire waste stream is generally collected into one tank that can be located away from the dwelling and does not require separate greywater management.

MAINTENANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Maintenance is the responsibility of the owner/occupier and is not normally subject to a maintenance contract. The owner/occupier needs to be committed to the principles of composting. Maintenance varies among composting toilets. If maintenance is not undertaken properly, there is increased health risk and increased odour generation.

Householders should be aware of the stringent maintenance requirements of composting toilets. The factors of water content, temperature airflow patterns, pH, toilet usage rate, surface area compost and oxygen penetration depth, all influence the rate and effectiveness of the biological breakdown of the waste materials.

Correct operation of composting toilets requires the addition of carbon rich materials to the compost heap. Vegetable scraps and lawn clippings will assist the decomposition process through the addition of organic matter and reduction in moisture content.

Newspaper, sawdust and other absorbent materials provide bulk and spaces which allow increased aeration and ensures appropriate conditions are maintained. Unless otherwise directed by Council, the composted humus material must be buried within the confines of the premises with the cover of soil over the deposited humus at least 75 mm in depth.

Any domestic composting system installed in New South Wales must be accredited by NSW Health and have a valid *Council Approval to Install and or Operate*. Council cannot approve the installation or operation of non-accredited systems.

Further information is available by contacting Council on 4227 7111.