

**HOW TO MANAGE YOUR ONSITE WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

Wastewater in non-sewered areas is managed by using an onsite wastewater management system (OWMS), such as a septic tank or a treatment plant. Management of treated wastewater from your OWMS is **your responsibility**. Older systems, poorly installed systems, and poorly maintained systems can be a risk to human health and the environment; however, correctly maintaining your system will prevent harm and increase the life of your system.

* Keep and hold all records of maintenance activities carried out on the system for 5 years, including all pump-out and service records.
* On request from Council, make any records of maintenance available.
* A reserve area must be kept available for all soil absorption type trenches if they need to be replaced in future. Contact Council if you are unsure where this is.
* Ensure that all stormwater is diverted to a legal point of discharge.
* Don’t cover any part of the system with paving, concrete, buildings, garden beds, large trees, vehicles, livestock etc.
* Ensure that suitable plants and landscaping is maintained over the life of the system. Council can be contacted for a list of suitable plants to be used. If you are planning on changing the landscape of the area, please contact Council before doing so to ensure that it is compatible with the system.
* Ensure that all wastewater is contained within the property boundaries. No offsite discharge of effluent is permitted.
* Repair leaking taps quickly to minimise water usage.

Under the *Environmental Protection Act 2017*, the **general environmental duty** **(GED)** requires any person engaging in an activity that may cause risk of harm to human health or the environment from pollution or waste to minimise these risks. The GED applies to people who own or use an OWMS and how the system is constructed, installed, altered, operated, and maintained.

The *Environment Protection Regulations 2021* further outlines the requirements and obligations needed to maintain an OWMS. To ensure that your system is maintained in good working order you should:

* De-sludge the primary septic tank system at least once every 3 years, or sooner if it reaches capacity.
* Use a licensed plumber to assess whether your system needs cleaning and unblocking.
* If your property has a treatment plant, have it serviced by a suitably qualified agent at least once every 3 months in accordance with the system manufacturer‘s specifications.
* Ensure that any maintenance issues identified by a servicing agent are addressed as soon as possible to minimise ongoing damage to the system.
* If your property has a treatment plant, maintain the disinfection chamber. The chamber will either use chlorine or UV light to disinfect the treated water:
* For systems that use chlorine, the chlorine tablets must be fitted to the dispenser correctly.
* For systems with UV light, the light tubes must be cleaned regularly.

**How to keep your OWMS working well**

* Don’t use any bleach, detergent, or disinfectant unless they are designed for use in an OWMS.
* Don’t flush non-biodegradable objects down the toilet that could block the system such as grease, personal products, plastics, or cat litter.
* To reduce sludge build-up in the tank, ensure you scrape all the dishes to remove fats, grease, and food scraps before washing them.
* Don’t use a food waste disposal unit unless your system can carry the extra load.

Not all bacteria are harmful. Some of the bacteria in your system are needed to breakdown the waste and convert them to liquids and gases. To ensure you don’t kill these good bacteria:

* Use low phosphorus and low sodium (liquid) detergents to improve effluent quality and maintain the soil’s properties.
* Follow the directions on the bottle of detergent for the correct amount to be used.
* Don’t put chemicals or paint down your drains.

To reduce the amount of wastewater you produce:

* Ensure good water conservation practices are maintained. It is important for the ongoing performance of the system so that it isn’t overloaded.
* Having a high star rating for water efficiency is recommended for all future water fixtures.
* Take showers instead of baths.
* Wash only full loads of laundry and spread loads out during the week, instead of doing all loads in one day.
* Don’t run your dishwasher or washing machine at the same time.

**Is your system healthy?**

You must monitor your system, especially in older systems, for any potential failures. Your system may need attention if you notice any of the following signs:

* A rotten egg smell or an unpleasant odour around the tank or effluent field.
* The effluent field is damp or soggy.
* The toilet or drains are slow or keep backing up.
* There is a lot of dark green grass growing on or around the absorption area.
* There is overflow from the system.
* Wastewater run-off from the disposal area.
* Wastewater is pooling on the disposal field’s surface.

You must take steps to address any issues that arise as soon as possible.

Council has a list of plumbers, service agents, and de-sludging contractors available. Please be aware that that any work carried outside of maintenance will require a permit from Council’s Environmental Health Team. You can contact the Environmental Health Team on 5366 7100 or via email at info@moorabool.vic.gov.au.

