



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

### FACT SHEET 4: SEPTIC TANK WITH REED BED

If you live in a country town and have a septic system that treats your wastewater, then it is possible that you also have a reed bed connected to your septic tank system. This fact sheet focuses on reed beds, their issues and some ideas to manage them better.

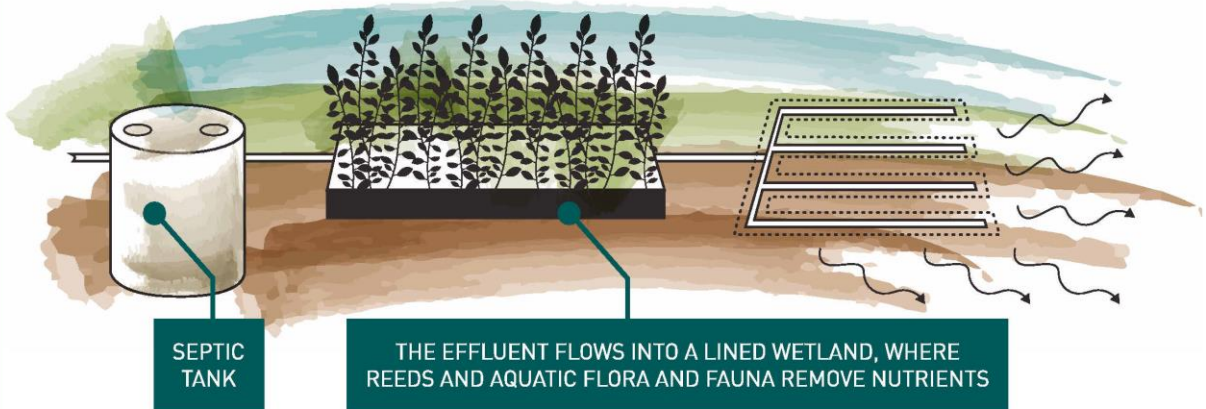


## 4.1 WHAT IS A REED BED?

Reed bed disposal is a wastewater disposal method that has been used occasionally to comprehensively treat wastewater. Reed beds offer the opportunity to treat wastewater from a conventional septic tank system in a manner that results in reduced particles and reduced biochemical activity, but also

a significant reduction of nutrients in the wastewater. This is achieved primarily by the strategic use of reeds in a pond-like structure. Here the reeds act to filter and uptake components of the wastewater, withdrawing them from suspension and resulting in a higher quality wastewater.

### DIAGRAM 1: A BASIC SYSTEM



## 4.2 WHAT ARE THE COMMON ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH REED BEDS THAT YOU SHOULD BE AWARE OF:

- Animals, such as rabbits, eating the plant roots;
- People walking on or interfering with the reed bed, where the risk of contact with the sewage is to be avoided;
- The plants dying due to other reasons, including unfriendly chemicals in the wastewater;
- The pump that assists with spreading the wastewater across the surface of the reed bed breaking down;
- Too much water going into the septic tank and reed bed. This can also result in solids being pushed out of the tank and clogging up pipework.

## 4.3 A FEW SIMPLE STEPS TO A HEALTHY REED BED AND WALLET:

- Reeds must be periodically removed when their population becomes too great;
- Reeds must be replaced immediately, if they are beginning to die or significantly reduce in numbers;
- Wastewater must be contained within the pond structure and then disposed of using an approved method, for example as shown above in an absorption field (refer to Diagram 1).
- For information on septic tanks refer to Fact Sheet 1: Conventional Septic Tanks and Absorption Trenches;



## 4.4 CURRENT REQUIREMENTS FOR REED BEDS:

Currently, there are very few reed beds with a Certificate of Approval for installation in Victoria. Existing reed beds are still permitted to be used until one or more of the following arise:

- Your system fails and requires repair or replacement;
- The risk of environmental degradation or health impacts becomes too great;
- A reticulated sewer becomes available in your area;
- You alter your house design or any plumbing fixtures attached to your septic tank system;
- Your reed bed no longer meets the water quality standards it is required to achieve; or

- You have been given an order by local government or other relevant wastewater or environmental protection agency to upgrade the wastewater management system.

Should your reed bed no longer be a viable option, it will need to be replaced with a disposal system that is currently approved for installation in Victoria. Therefore, it is in your interest to maintain your wastewater management system to the highest standard possible in order to protect the natural environment, your community, your family's health and your hip-pocket.

## 4.5 WHO TO CONTACT:



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