



Tips for caring for your septic tank

The following points will help to ensure correct operation of your septic tank system and help extend the life of the system.

- Use toilet paper that readily breaks down. Do not flush sanitary napkins, tampons, disposable nappies etc. down the toilet as these items do not break down and will cause the septic tank to block.
- Household detergents and bathroom products should be biodegradable. Try to find products labelled 'septic tank safe' and use only as recommended.
- Disposal of cooking oils and fats down the drain may cause blockages in the system. Dispose of these by placing them in a sealed container and putting them in the general rubbish bin. Thoroughly scrape all food scraps, oil and fat residue from plates, dishes, saucepans etc before washing them.
- Avoid fitting food waste disposal units. Instead, compost raw vegetable materials in a compost bin or worm farm.
- Unused medicines and pharmaceutical products should be correctly disposed of and not allowed to enter the septic tank system.
- Do not discharge commercial or industrial waste such as paints and petrol products into the septic tank system.

- Ensure storm water, including rainwater tank overflows and surface run off, does not enter the septic tank system.
- Backwash water from swimming pools and spas must not be discharged into the septic tank. In Community Waste Management Service (CWMS) areas the discharge is to be connected after the septic tank via a gully trap. Where CWMS is not available, the discharge is to be directed to a below ground agricultural drain or subsurface soakage trench. Contact Council for more details.
- Relief valves on mains pressure hot water services should be activated every 2-3 months to prevent valve failure and the constant dripping of water into the septic tank system.
- All vents and inspection openings into the drain and septic tank should be properly sealed to prevent access of mosquitoes.

What to do if you have a blockage

The most common reason for a blockage is the collection of material at the inlet point of the tank. In older tanks there is a cleaning point at the inlet of the tank. More recently made tanks have an inspection point over the inlet point. Plunging either of these points will release the built up material and clear the blockage.

If your house has old style earthenware drains there is a higher possibility of blockages due to intrusion of tree roots. Houses with PVC drains are less likely to suffer from this sort of problem. An older septic tank may also become blocked due to root intrusion.

Experience has shown that a septic tank can comfortably survive five years between pump outs. If a blockage occurs before then it is likely to be a blockage at the inlet point of the tank. Plunging of the inlet point as described above will clear the blockage in most cases.

It is not always possible to clear a blockage yourself and in many cases the assistance of a plumber will be necessary.

Common causes of odours

It is normal for septic tank systems to give off some odours. Most odours originate from the septic tank and discharge through the head vent. People may or may not notice odours depending on the location of vents on the house.

Common causes of odours are listed below.

- Calm weather conditions can emphasise odour problems for a longer period of time.
- Verandahs, pergolas, high fences etc. in the vicinity of the head vent can trap any unpleasant odours, particularly on calm days.
- Sometimes odours may come from a neighbour's vent if dwellings are within close proximity.
- Odours may be escaping from a septic tank lid or inspection point situated at ground level rather than from a vent.
- Heavy water usage (e.g. when clothes washing) may agitate the septic tank contents causing a surge in odours.
- Odours can be exacerbated after the tank has been recently pumped out. This is due to the fact that the primary chamber of the tank has not developed enough microbiological activity.

Note: Unpleasant odours are not a health risk and do not necessarily mean that the septic tank needs pumping out.

Pump out of your septic tank

Your septic tank should be pumped out every five years. If you are connected to CWMS, Council offers a pump out service every five years which is included in your rates. Council's contractor will notify you by mail when your pump out is due.

In the case of multiple units or commercial situations, more frequent pump outs may be required.

If your septic tank is not connected to Council's CWMS you should organise to have your septic tank pumped out every five years.