



On-Site Sewerage Management System

What if my property is not serviced by Sydney Water's sewerage infrastructure?

If you own a property that is not serviced by Sydney Water's sewerage infrastructure you will need an On-Site Sewerage Management System (OSSM) to manage sewerage.

What is an OSSM?

On-Site Sewerage Management Systems (OSSMs) can include:

- septic tanks
- aerated wastewater treatment systems
- holding tanks with pump out
- wet composting toilets
- recirculating sand filter systems
- grey water treatment systems
- waterless composting systems

On-site sewage management includes any activity carried out for the purpose of holding, processing, reusing, disposing of sewage or by-products of sewage.

Is approval from Council required to install and operate an OSSM?

Yes. There are two ways you can get approval from Council to install and operate an OSSM:

1. you can request approval as part of your development application for a dwelling
2. you can request approval separately by submitting an Activities Application Form.

Approval to install and operate an OSSM is granted under Section 68 of the [Local Government Act 1993](#).

Ongoing Maintenance of your OSSM

The effective operation of the septic tank and disposal area will, in part, depend on how it is managed and maintained. A small amount of maintenance work performed regularly can prevent your system from failing. The following is a guide on how to achieve the most from your system.

Things to do:

- ensure your wastewater system is the appropriate design for the area. Inappropriate systems can pollute the natural environment and pose health risks to humans



- regularly maintain the disposal area. Long grass and weeds reduce the evapotranspiration efficiency. Cut and remove grass clippings from the disposal area
- have your septic tank de-sludged every three to five years to prevent sludge build up, which may 'clog' the pipes and absorption trenches
- prevent the entry of stormwater onto the disposal area by constructing a diversion drain higher than the disposal area. Direct the stormwater around the disposal area, but not into neighbouring properties
- ensure your tank is well sealed. This prevents the entry of vermin and mosquitoes
- conserve water. The less water you use the drier the disposal area will be, especially through the cooler months
- check household products for suitability for use with a septic tank. Use biodegradable liquid detergents, which are low phosphorous and low sodium
- have your grease trap (if installed) cleaned out regularly ie three monthly
- know the location and layout of your septic system and disposal area
- keep a record of pumping, inspections, and other maintenance.

Things not to do:

- don't allow livestock to graze on the absorption/transpiration area. This can lead to compaction and collapse of the area

- don't put large quantities of bleaches, disinfectants, whiteners, nappy soakers and spot removers into your septic tank via the sink, washing machine or toilet. These products can kill off the good bacteria needed to break down wastewater solids
- don't allow any foreign materials such as nappies, sanitary napkins, condoms or other hygiene products to enter the system
- don't put fats and oils down the drain and keep food waste out of your system
- don't install or use a garbage grinder or spa bath if your system is not designed for it.

What to do if there is a problem with your septic tank or disposal area?

If there is a problem with your septic tank or disposal area that has the potential to impact on the environment or public health then you must by law fix it. Indications of a problem include foul smells from the tank or disposal area, toilets and drains that back up or drain slowly, high water level in the septic tank, no de-sludging of tank in the last 5 years or a wet/soggy disposal area. Do not ignore the problem, it will only get worse and could cost you more money in the long term.

For regulatory advice prior to carrying out any alterations/modifications to existing systems or the installation of a new system you should contact Council.

For operational problems with an existing system you should contact a licensed plumber.

What do I do when I'm selling a property with an OSSM?

Owners who are selling their property should make sure that the new property owner receives a copy of the OSSM operation and maintenance manual and additional copies are available upon request. The manual should include the following items:

- system operation and capabilities
- operating requirements - system capacity, the importance of a balanced wastewater hydraulic load (ie spread clothes washing loads over a week, not all in one day) and actions to be avoided
- troubleshooting and signs of system failure - such as, unsatisfactory operation of plumbing fixtures, odours and surface ponding of wastewater
- maintenance and servicing requirements
- management of health risks
- occupational health and safety, first aid and chemical handling
- emergency telephone numbers (ie authorised service agent, plumber and drainer, electrician, wastewater pump out contractor).

The vendor should arrange for an inspection of the OSSM system prior to sale by a suitably qualified and experienced person (ie NSW licensed plumber and drainer).

What do I do when I'm buying a property with an OSSM?

It is the buyer's responsibility to ask questions about the OSSM system and request or arrange for an OSSM system inspection report. The operational performance of the OSSM system is often overlooked during the property purchasing/selling process. If the OSSM system is defective it may incur significant costs on the new property owner.

The purchaser of the property needs to request approval to operate their OSSM. This application must be completed within two months of the sale of the property (application form available on Council's website). A copy of the OSSM inspection report needs to be submitted to Council at this stage.

Need help?

If you have any questions, Council's Development Assessment staff are available for brief consultations and to provide general advice at Council's Customer Service counter between 8.45am and 11am Monday to Friday.

Appointments may be made outside these hours, subject to availability. Council staff cannot assist in the preparation of your application or the supporting documents.

Disclaimer

This fact sheet provides a summary of key elements of OSSMs. Any person using this document must do so on the basis that, not every scenario and issue can be addressed, and discussion with Council should be undertaken. This document is subject to change without notice.