

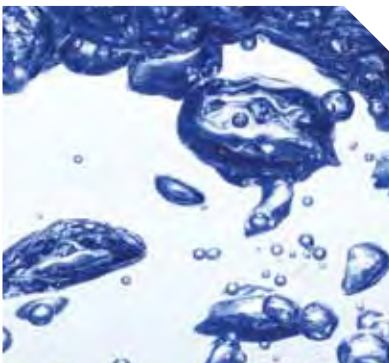


# TOWARDS BETTER ONSITE WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT IN VICTORIA - COMMUNITY EDUCATION SERIES

## **FACT SHEET 10:** LAND OWNERS – CONSIDERING INSTALLING OR ALTERING AN ONSITE DOMESTIC WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

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This fact sheet provides an overview of the processes associated with the approval and installation of septic systems and package treatment plants for domestic properties. This information has been designed to assist a home owner looking to install a new system or alter an existing system on their properties. (Please check with your local Environmental Health Practitioner (EHP or EHO) to ensure you get all the requirements for your area.)



Please note, information and facts contained in this publication were correct at the time of printing and production.

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## 10.1 LAND OWNERS GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES:

- To ensure the onsite wastewater management system is functioning correctly and all wastewater is being adequately contained within the bounds of the property;
- To ensure repairs are completed promptly when the wastewater system is not functioning correctly;
- To ensure that the system is well monitored and maintained. This involves inspecting the system regularly;
- To arrange for the wastewater system to be de-sludged at least every 3 to 5 years, depending on use;
- To ensure the wastewater system (package treatment plants only) is serviced quarterly by a qualified service agent; and
- To obtain council approval for the installation, repair or alteration of a septic system or package treatment plant as required.

## 10.2 LOOKING TO INSTALL OR ALTER A DOMESTIC WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM? YOU SHOULD CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

- The septic tank or package treatment plant must be installed **a minimum of 2m** from the dwelling to ensure it does not interfere with the integrity of the structure;
- Soil types play a significant role in the successful operation of a domestic wastewater management system. To give an idea, the following are the main soil types and their drainage capabilities:
  - Gravels and sands drain very well;
  - Sandy loams drain well;
  - Loams drain moderately well;
  - Clay loams and light clays drain quite poorly; and
  - Medium to heavy clays drain very poorly.

The ability of the soil to accept and treat wastewater will influence the size of the disposal area required and the way in which the disposal system is constructed. (Please consult your local government Environmental Health Practitioner (EHP or EHO) for specific local requirements and advice).
- There needs to be a suitable portion of your property reserved for the effluent disposal area. The effluent disposal system must be located:
  - In an area that is permanently dedicated to wastewater disposal;
  - In an area that is not subject to vehicle traffic or stock;
  - That meets the setback distances as described in Table 1 below;
  - Where there is adequate solar exposure to assist evaporation and transpiration;
  - Away from any object of environmental significance including creeks, dams etc.;
  - Away from deep rooted plants that can infiltrate and damage the disposal system;
  - In an area where there is a suitable slope of the land to allow for effluent disposal but not too great to prevent adequate installation;
  - In an area where shallow rooted vegetation can be planted and maintained e.g. grass;
  - In an area that is not subject to flooding or pooling surface water;
  - Away from areas with a shallow depth to ground water (0.5m from trench base);
  - Away from areas with a shallow depth to hard rock; and
  - Within the bounds of the allotment as defined by a single title.

**TABLE 1: SETBACK DISTANCE GUIDE**

ITEM	SETBACK DISTANCE (M)	ITEM	SETBACK DISTANCE (M)
<b>BUILDING</b>		<b>SERVICES (CONTINUED)</b>	
Wastewater field up-slope of building	6	Stormwater drain	6
Wastewater field down-slope of building	3	Swimming pool	6
<b>ALLOTMENT BOUNDRY</b>		Cutting / escarpment	15
Wastewater field up-slope of adjacent lot	6	<b>SURFACE</b>	
Wastewater field down-slope of adjacent lot	3	Dam or reservoir (potable, includes water for food production)	300
<b>SERVICES</b>		Stream, river, waterways (potable water supply catchment)	100
Water supply pipe	3	Dam or reservoir (stock and non potable)	60
Potable supply channel (wastewater field up slope)	100	Stream or channel (continuous or ephemeral non-potable)	60
Potable supply channel (wastewater field down slope)	20	<b>GROUNDWATER BORE</b>	
Gas	3	Potable or non-potable	20
Underground water tank	15		

### 10.3 OTHER HELPFUL DOMESTIC WASTEWATER FACT SHEETS:

If you are considering a conventional septic tank system then you should read Fact Sheet 1: Septic Tanks and Absorption Trenches. If you are

considering a package treatment plant then you should read Fact Sheet 2: Package Treatment Plants.

### 10.4 SYSTEMS APPROVED FOR USE IN VICTORIA:

Onsite domestic wastewater management systems (e.g. conventional septic tank systems, a range of package treatment plants, and alternative wastewater management systems) that can be installed in Victoria must have a current Certificate of Approval issued by the Victorian Environment Protection Authority (EPA). Wastewater management systems with a current

Certificate of Approval will involve the simplest process when applying for permission to install a system. The manufacturer or their representative should be able to give you a copy of this certificate or you can visit the EPA website and review approved systems for yourself. The website address is [www.epa.vic.gov.au/water/wastewater/onsite.asp](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/water/wastewater/onsite.asp).

### 10.5 ROLE OF YOUR LOCAL COUNCIL AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS:

In terms of onsite wastewater management, your local council is responsible for:

- Assessing applications for new installations, and repairs or alterations to existing systems;
- Maintaining a register of systems within the local government area;
- Monitoring and assisting to limit the potential cumulative impacts of sewage pollution;
- Providing basic advice to system owners who need assistance in repairing or maintaining their systems;
- Assessing land development proposals (e.g. new subdivisions in unsewered areas); and
- Developing domestic wastewater management plans that provide a strategic framework for managing domestic wastewater within that local authority area.

## 10.6 ROLE OF THE LICENSED PLUMBING PRACTITIONER:

- To liaise with the local environmental health practitioner with regard to the installation of a new system, or the repair or alteration of an existing system;
- To assist in submitting applications to install, repair or alter any domestic wastewater system;
- Share any information provided by the local environmental health practitioner (EHP or EHO) in relation to requirements, site inspections and any other relevant information associated with your system and the work being undertaken;
- To provide technical advice when selecting an appropriate site and designing wastewater system specific to your needs; and
- Assist with information about the operation and maintenance of your system.

## 10.7 ROLE OF THE PLUMBING INDUSTRY COMMISSION (PIC):

The PIC is important to the work related to the installation, repair or alternation to your domestic wastewater system by:

- Licensing plumbing practitioners who do the work on your domestic wastewater system;
- Providing the mechanism for plumbing practitioners to self-certify their work by issuing Compliance Certificates. The Compliance Certificate certifies that the plumbing work complies with all relevant regulatory requirements and provides insurance coverage for the work for up to six years; and
- Conducting audits and inspections of a percentage of work undertaken to ensure plumbing work undertaken meets the high standard required to ensure consumer safety. The PIC can also follow up with any legal action and rehabilitation work as required.

## 10.8 COMPARISONS BETWEEN CONVENTIONAL SEPTIC TANKS AND PACKAGE TREATMENT PLANTS:

CONVENTIONAL SEPTIC SYSTEM	PACKAGE TREATMENT PLANT
Generally does not require power, unless the effluent needs to be pumped.	Requires a continual supply of power.
Limited maintenance - a de-sludge every 3-5 years, depending on use.	Requires regular maintenance – serviced once every 3 months, annual water sample test and a de-sludge every 3-5 years, depending on use.
Generally costs between \$7,000 & \$10,000.	Generally costs between \$10,000 & \$15,000.

*Information on this fact sheet is not intended to favour one system over another.*

Check with manufacturers for specific details and your local environmental health practitioner (EHP or EHO: Environmental Health Officer) for suitability when choosing a new system for your house.

Package treatment plants may be a good alternative on properties with environmentally sensitive features or limited available area.



## 10.9 THE BASIC APPROVAL PROCESS:

Below is the basic process to follow when installing, repairing or altering a domestic wastewater system:

You need to apply to your local council for a Permit to Install or Alter. This application needs to include the following:

- Details of the type of system and effluent disposal method;
- A completed copy of the relevant application forms available from your local government;
- Plans and specifications showing:
  - The location of the house on the property;
  - Exact location of all plumbing fixtures and fittings;
  - Location of and distance to all additional buildings, proposed buildings, swimming pool, water tanks, driveways, excavations, stormwater drains, water pipes, easement drains, streams, dams and other water ways;
  - Fall of the land in the vicinity of the disposal area;
  - Position of the package treatment plant or septic tank and the effluent disposal area.
- An EHP (EHO) will then conduct a thorough inspection of the property prior to issuing the Permit to Install. This is to confirm all the details in the application;
- Once satisfied, the EHP (EHO) will then issue you with the Permit to Install/Alter;
- This permit will contain important conditions that are legally binding and need to be followed in order for your system to receive final approval (or a Permit to Use). You should familiarise yourself with these conditions;
- Most councils undertake progress inspections. The main progress inspection will be undertaken before the trenches are back filled, but once the base aggregate has been laid and pipes are in place. The local EHP (EHO) needs to be contacted when the job has progressed to this point so that the installed, but uncovered work, can be inspected; and
- When all the work is completed, the EHP (EHO) needs to be contacted to carry out a final inspection. Once satisfied that all the conditions in the Permit to Install/Alter have been met and the licensed plumbing practitioner has provided a copy of the PIC Compliance Certificate for all drainage works and any internal plumbing works, a copy of a plan of the system as it was constructed, and a commissioning certificate (package treatment plants only), the EHP (EHO) can issue a Permit to Use the wastewater system.

## 10.10 WHO TO CONTACT:

PRODUCED AND FUNDED BY:



\* ALL WASTEWATER IS TO BE RETAINED ON THE PROPERTY