

More information

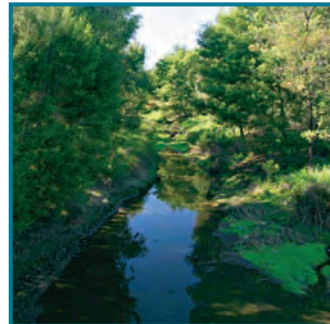
Be Septic Safe Fact Sheet

Health and Local Laws Unit
Manningham City Council
Phone: 9840 9333

www.manningham.vic.gov.au
Search for "sewer program"

www.yvw.com.au
Yarra Valley Water

March 2008



Septic systems need ongoing maintenance to protect public health, local waterways and the environment. Councils are responsible for inspecting and approving septic systems. Eighty percent of the septic systems inspected by Manningham Council since 2002 were found to be defective and poorly maintained.

Yarra Valley Water is providing new sewerage services to Templestowe, Park Orchards, Wonga Park and Warrandyte. Property owners in these areas are still legally responsible for maintaining their septic system until the sewer is available for connection.



Interim maintenance

In areas where sewer services are expected within three years, owners need to:

- continue regular maintenance
- Replace necessary components where these are found to be defective.

Regular maintenance

Maintenance involves regular inspection, pumping sludge from septic tanks, replenishing or replacing sand filters and removing blockages. Owners are legally obliged to maintain their septic system in a satisfactory working order including pumping the tank out at least every three years and adhere to the permit conditions for the system.

What is a septic system?

A septic tank system treats and disposes of waste from toilets, bathrooms and kitchens. It is generally made up of:

- Primary treatment
A septic (or settling tank) to separate liquid from solid waste
- Secondary treatment
A sand filter or treatment plant that treats liquid waste from the primary treatment tank into a suitable standard for disposal
- Tertiary treatment
Disposing of treated wastewater into on-site agricultural drains (or some type of irrigation line).

60% of Manningham properties with septic systems still discharge waste directly into stormwater drains and our waterways. Owners of this type of septic system are required to have their septic water discharge regularly tested by an approved laboratory. (See Testing Septic Systems.)

Do you know the type and location of your septic tank system?

The different types of septic system each have specific maintenance requirements. It's important for owners to understand their own system.

Type of system	Description	Maintenance
Septic tank	<p>A concrete tank buried away from the house. Heavy wastes settle to the bottom and liquids flow through the tank into the sand filter.</p> <p>Most septic tanks are all-purpose tanks - dual grease traps and settling tanks.</p> <p>Some Manningham properties have a split system, a combination of a smaller tank (W.C. wastes only septic tank) for toilet waste and a grease trap.</p>	<p>Pump out tank every three years. Check the level of sludge in your tank annually.</p> <p>See below for other requirements for septic systems with a treatment plant.</p> <p>Be aware of the requirements in the original septic tank permit from Manningham Council.</p>
Grease trap	A grease trap separates fatty wastes and oils from liquids. Grease traps have a concrete lid and are found outside near the kitchen sink.	Inspect regularly (at least every three months). Pump out as needed, usually every 6 – 12 months for domestic use.
Sand filters	Liquid effluent flows from the tank into a sand filter or an effluent disposal trench (see below). A sand filter is like a sandpit under grass with a concrete pit at either end. Effluent filters through the sand and into a pit before discharging.	<p>Don't concrete over a sand filter, cover with more earth or drive over it.</p> <p>Regularly check the concrete pit at the inlet and outlet to ensure that water leaving the septic tank is not high in solids. This may be a sign that the septic tank is full.</p>
Effluent disposal trenches, agricultural drains or absorption trenches	Used on larger properties. A series of trenches with a slotted pipe beneath a layer of crushed rock and earth.	Protect trenches from surface waters, traffic and livestock. Trenches can't be built or concreted over. Regularly inspect the condition of trenches at the distribution pit on the inlet of the agricultural drains.
Treatment plants	Underground concrete chambers with mechanical parts.	Need an electricity supply and a warning light or alarm at the house. Treatment plants need servicing as per the EPA certificate of approval for your treatment plant.

Pumping

Pump out tanks regularly to avoid expensive and messy blockages and malfunctions that cause soil contamination and degradation of the groundwater feeding into our rivers and streams. Effluent can back up into the tank and then into the house.

Look in the Yellow Pages under 'Septic Tank Cleaning Services' for specialist companies that pump out septic tanks and grease traps.

Testing Septic Systems

If a system discharges effluent to a stormwater drain (60% of Manningham systems) the treated effluent must be regularly tested by a National Association of Testing Laboratories-approved laboratory. Look in the Yellow Pages under 'Analysts'. Council notifies owners when this analysis is due and requires test results within 14 days.

Trouble shooting

Signs of septic systems needing attention are:

- Toilet flushing slowly or water draining slowly from showers and basins
- Damp or boggy areas in your garden (could be a blockage)
- Odours
- Discoloured water
- Localised overgrowth.

