

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS - Onsite Wastewater Management Plan Inspection Program in Nelson

1. What are councils' responsibilities in relation to wastewater? What is the Domestic Wastewater Management Plan?

Local councils are responsible for regulating the assessment, installation, use and management of onsite wastewater systems.

Councils with onsite domestic wastewater management systems are required to develop and implement a *Domestic Wastewater Management Plan*. Council also has responsibilities under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*, to seek to protect, improve and promote public health within the local government area.

Council adopted its current Domestic Wastewater Management Plan in June 2022.

2. What are my responsibilities as the owner in relation to wastewater?

Managing and maintaining onsite wastewater systems is the responsibility of the property owner to ensure the system is operating correctly and both public health and the environment are protected.

Environmental Protection Regulations 2021 commenced on July 1 2021.

Part 5.7 of these regulations require owners and occupiers of onsite wastewater systems to:

- operate the system correctly
- make sure it does not overflow
- maintain the system in good working order
- notify the local council as soon as is practical if there is a problem with the system.
- provide written information about how to use the system to the person in management or control of the system (for example a renter)
- keep maintenance records (and provide them to council when requested).

These obligations under the regulations apply to all systems, including older systems that didn't require a permit when they were installed.

3. What should I do before the inspection occurs?

Get a licensed service agent to service your system and de-sludge if required (over 5 years ago).

4. What maintenance does my septic tank require?

Septic tanks are designed to generally require desludging once every 5-7 years.

Treatment plants are required to be serviced in accordance with manufacturer specifications which is, in most cases, once every 3 months. You can contact a service agent who will check your system and let you know if any parts require replacement, or the system requires desludging (commonly called a 'pump-out').

Different types of septic systems have different maintenance requirements. Your responsibilities as the property owner are also stated on your permit conditions (where applicable).

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Standard septic system

- Service to be undertaken by a licenced plumber/drainier.
- Desludge of the primary tank at least once every five years or whenever the tank becomes more than half full of sludge.

Aerated treatment systems (ATWS) - mechanical treatment plants system

- Annual water tests to be undertaken and tested by an accredited NATA laboratory.
- Quarterly Service to be undertaken by a licenced servicing agent.
- Desludge of the primary tank every 3 years (depending on the type of AWTS and the requirements of the Certificate of Conformance issued by a JAS-ANZ Certified Accrediting Body) or when the sludge and scum level exceeds the liquid level (more than 50 percent of tank capacity).

Sand filter system

- Annual water tests to be undertaken and tested by an accredited NATA laboratory.
- Annual Service to be undertaken by a licenced plumber/drainier. Desludge of the primary tank at least once every three years or whenever the tank becomes more than half full of sludge.

Worm farm

- Service to be undertaken by a licenced plumber/drainier. The system must be maintained in accordance with the conditions on the Certificate of Conformance and the manufacturer's specifications.

5. Who are licensed plumbers/service companies?

Only registered, licensed wastewater service personnel can service wastewater treatment systems, as condition of their state accreditation approval.

Septic tank pump-out services in the Glenelg Shire are provided by *Parfrey Plumbing* and *Rentschs Mailors Flat*, as a licenced and accredited EPA disposal agency.

Servicing and maintenance of treatment plants may be carried out by an accredited servicing agent. Commonly this includes *Aerowaste Wastewater Water Management Services* (commonly services Taylex, BioCycle and EnviroSeptic Systems), *South East Wastewater Management* and *Sporn's Plumbing* (which exclusively services Ozzi Kleen systems).

6. Why should I consent to inspection of the wastewater system?

It's important to ensure the health of your septic tank system. A poorly maintained or failing system:

- Is a health risk to your family and friends
- Potentially damaging to our environment and waterways

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- Lead to costly repairs and/or replacement
- An check on your septic system is important for the care and maintenance of your septic system.

Table: Potential impacts of failing systems

Human Health	Environmental	Social
Spread of disease and minor illness	Pollution of surface water and ground water	Decreased amenity due to unsightly discharges
Contamination of drinking water	Degradation of soils	Offensive Odour
Harbourage of vermin (mosquitos)	Degradation of aquatic fauna and indigenous vegetation	Impacts on property values
Contamination of recreational water bodies	Increased weed growth	Financial impacts for system owners

7. How can I care for my septic system to improve performance?

- Minimise the amount of bleach, detergents and disinfectants that are flushed down the system. This will kill the helpful bacteria in the septic system.
- Do not put sanitary products, nappies, condoms, or other products down the system
- Minimise the amount of fats and oils flushed down the system
- Reduced water usage and spread-out water usage over the day to lessen the likelihood of system overload occurring
- Not having the tank de-sludged regularly can result in the tank failing and heaving solids flowing out of the tank into the absorption trenches

8. What are the signs of a failing system?

- Sewage smell
- Water backing up/not draining away easily from sinks, showers, bath or washing machine
- Wastewater pooling over the land application area/backyard
- Water that drains slowly
- Blockages
- Audible and visual alarm system warning
- Collapsed or sunken depressions caused by the trenches or irrigation area

9. Outcome of the inspection program?

We will be in touch individually if there are any issues that require further actions and will follow up to ensure that this is completed.

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We aim to get a better understanding the of the volume and overall health of onsite wastewater systems within Nelson. This program will inform, further down the track, efficient wastewater management by council of systems under 5000L.