

FACT SHEET



– Knowing your septic tank on-site sewage system

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WHAT ARE THEY?

A septic tank is an system used to treat sewage in unsewered areas. Minor treatment takes place in the septic tank before the liquid effluent passes into an absorption trench.

HOW DO THEY WORK?

Your septic tank is a living ecosystem containing bacteria and micro-organisms break down the solid waste and help treat the water.

Effluent enters the tank through an inlet junction. Inside the tank there are 3 layers -

- A floating scum layer at the top made of oil and grease and light solids
- The sludge layer on the bottom made of the solids which are not dissolved.
- The liquid effluent layer between the sludge and scum layers

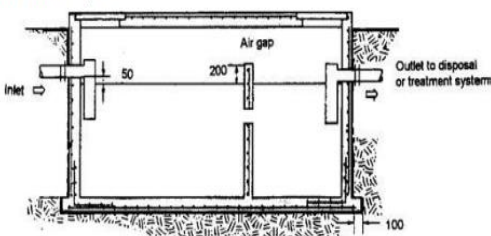
As the septic tank fills, the clear liquid effluent passes through the outlet junction to the absorption trench.

In the absorption trench natural soil bacteria break down some of the pollutants and pathogens.

MAINTENANCE

Septic tanks need to be de-sludged (pumped-out) every 3-5 years to avoid a build-up of solids in the tank. If the tank is not de-sludged solids can enter the absorption trench, one of the most common reasons trenches fail.

Cross section of a septic tank



DO ✓

- ✓ Ensure you always have a current Approval to Operate.
- ✓ Use environmentally friendly, biodegradable detergents and cleaning products.
- ✓ Conserve water in the home to avoid overloading your septic system.
- ✓ Know the location and layout of your septic system.
- ✓ Have septic tanks de-sludged (pumped out) every 3-5 years.
- ✓ Plant grasses, small trees or shrubs downslope of the absorption trench to aid in absorbing effluent water.
- ✓ Use sink strainers in the kitchen to avoid unnecessary solids entering the septic.

REGULATIONS

All owners of sewage management systems in NSW are required to hold a current Approval to Operate. This Approval allows Councils to monitor and manage the cumulative impact of sewage pollution.

Approvals are granted for periods of 1, 3 or 5 years depending on the risk the system poses to public health and the environment.

Wastewater from septic system must not seep to the ground surface.

DO NOT ✗

- ✗ Use products that contain bleach, ammonia, antiseptic, antibacterial or high strength detergents.
- ✗ Discard any chemicals, pesticides, or herbicides down the drain
- ✗ Use more than the recommended amounts of detergents.
- ✗ Flush non-degradable products such as face wipes, hygiene products, nappies or condoms.
- ✗ Allow anyone to park or drive over the trench.
- ✗ Build structures or plant trees that will shade the absorption trench. Sunlight aids in effluent breakdown.
- ✗ Flood the trench area with sprinklers or hoses.
- ✗ Let stock walk over the trench.

IS YOUR SEPTIC HEALTHY?

There is a problem with your septic if you note any of the following occurring -

- There is a strong effluent odour present.
- The absorption trench is damp or soggy, or effluent is noted to be pooling on the soil surface.
- There is a high amount of grass or weeds growing around the absorption trench.
- Drains and/or toilets take time to clear or back up.
- There are cracks in the septic tank, inlet and/or outlet junctions.

