

Good Practice Guide for Operating On-site Wastewater Systems

Tasman Resource Management Plan Good Practice Guide No. 5

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Introduction

Properties within the Tasman District Council's district not serviced by Council's piped sewer system are required to manage household wastewater on their own property.

What is an On-Site Wastewater System?

It is how your household water and toilet wastes are managed within your property boundaries.

“On-site Wastewater System”

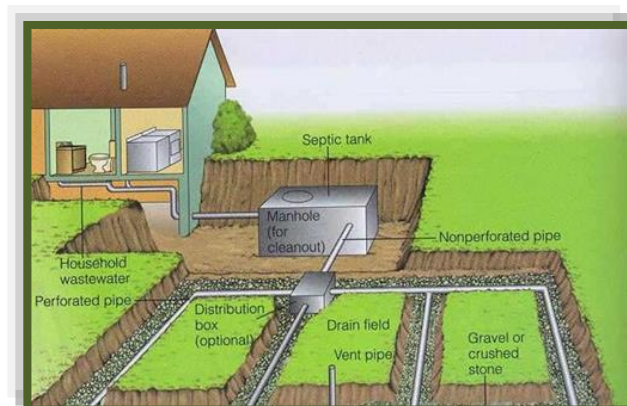
This is your septic tank or other system such as an advanced treatment system, a waterless composting toilet or a greywater system.

Long drop or pit toilets are permitted by the TRMP rules for intermittent use in remote locations that are separated from water sources (e.g., stream, well, groundwater).

What a Septic Tank does

The basic operation of a septic tank relies on its ability to retain wastewater for long enough to enable solids, fats and oils to settle.

Typical septic tanks operate by allowing solid material to settle out to the bottom of the tank as sludge, and lighter fats and oils to float to the top. Septic tanks also rely on the right kind of flora ('good bacteria') to break down some of the contents.



Cutaway section of a generic wastewater system

Having some sludge present in the bottom of your septic tank is necessary to support the good bacteria. Having too much sludge in your septic tank will reduce the amount of time wastewater can be held, resulting in insufficient wastewater treatment and potentially creating an environmental problem.

On average, a septic tank should be pumped clear of sludge every three to five years, however some may require pumping out on an annual basis. How regularly your septic tank requires pumping out will depend on what steps you take to conserve water and reduce sludge build-up.

Who is in Charge of the Home On-Site Wastewater System?

If you own a property with a home wastewater system, then it is your responsibility to maintain and look after your system. This may include getting your tank cleaned when needed or your advanced system serviced regularly by a suitably qualified person.

If you do not maintain your home wastewater system, then chances are it will not work well and it will eventually fail. Once the system has failed, replacement may be the only option, which can be difficult and expensive — especially on properties where there is not much usable land left.

It is much cheaper to maintain a system and keep it working well than it is to replace it.

Examples of On-Site Wastewater Systems

- Primary septic tank systems
- Advanced secondary treatment systems
- Septic tanks with reed beds, worms, mound, sand filter or other field types
- Waterless composting toilets with a greywater system

Installing a New or Upgrading an Existing On-Site Wastewater System

- Requires professional design
- Requires a building consent
- May require a resource consent

Site Conditions

Consider the following when designing an on-site wastewater system:

- Soil conditions — sandy or clay
- Water table — low or high
- Slope — flat or steep hillside
- Property size
- Stream or well location
- Loading — a dwelling (no. of bedrooms) or commercial activity.

On-site Wastewater Discharge that may require a Resource Consent

The on-site wastewater discharge may require a resource consent when:

- New wastewater discharges are within the Special Domestic Wastewater Disposal Area and the Wastewater Management Area.
- Where the volume of effluent discharged is more than a weekly averaged flow of 2,000 litres per day.
- Where the disposal field is located less than:
 - 20 metres away from any surface water body, or the coastal marine area
 - 20 metres from any bore for domestic water supply
 - 1.5 metres from any adjoining property

Other rules may require you to obtain a resource consent.

Read more about rules for permitted activities in the Tasman Resource Management Plan, Chapter 36 (Rules for Contaminant Discharges).

Who do I call if I have a problem?

A registered drainlayer or a septic tank cleaner if the tank needs pumping out.

Meaning of Words

Wastewater — All the water that comes out of the drains and toilet in a building.

Blackwater — The water that comes out of the toilet.

Greywater — The water that comes out of your shower, bath, basin, washing machine, laundry tub, dishwasher and kitchen sink.

Registered drainlayer — A drainlayer registered under the Plumbing and Drainage Act.

Septic tank — Tank into which the wastewater from the house goes.

Septic tank cleaner — Someone who is licensed as an Offensive Trade Operator.

Sludge — The solids that build up on the bottom of a septic tank.

Soakage area / soakage system — The area where the liquids from your home wastewater system is put onto the land. They are sometimes also known as soakage fields, drainage fields, disposal fields or land application areas.

TRMP — Tasman Resource Management Plan

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