



FACT SHEET

Maintenance hints for septic systems

1. Septic tanks reduce solids by bacterial decomposition. Consequently, sludge settles at the bottom of the tank, and a scum or crust forms at the liquid surface. The liquid effluent then discharges to subsurface disposal. Periodic checks are advisable, e.g. annually, to ensure that no carry-over of sludge (or crust) is entering the subsurface disposal system, thereby shortening its operational life.

To test the sludge level use a dip-stick, e.g. old broom handle and insert it down the outlet junction, then withdraw it and measure the depth at which the sludge is showing. Generally the distance from the top of the tank outlet junction to the top of the sludge should be greater than 800mm. The floating scum layer should be less than 300mm thick.

If the scum layer is greater than 300mm and/or sludge distance is less than 800mm then it is time to have the septic tank pumped out and filled with clean water. This is to be carried out by a council approved septic carter at the owner's expense.

It may well be a number of years before the sludge rises to a level where it may cause concern and is seldom less than 3 years, depending of course on the loading imposed on the tank.

2. If a filter has been installed inside the outlet of the septic tank, it must be maintained at regular intervals as recommended by the manufacturer, check at least 12 monthly. Filters are compulsory on new installations after July 1997. Check with your plumber for advice on your system requirements.
3. During their initial start up phase and on other occasions, offensive odours can be emitted from septic tank vents. A cup full of lime in slurry form, flushed down the toilet on alternate days, may overcome this problem.
4. Minimise use of antiseptic and disinfectants and use only septic friendly cleaning products.
5. Do not put disposable or sanitary napkins etc into your septic system. Use only good quality toilet paper.
6. Surface water and roof water discharge should be kept away from the disposal area. Surface water should be diverted on the high side by forming a diversion mound or drain and possibly installing a moisture barrier.
7. The discharge from sullage pump-out sprinkler systems is to be kept away from the septic disposal area. The sprinkler is to be moved periodically around the property & must be positioned to prevent discharge entering into or causing a nuisance to neighbouring properties. Sullage pump wells require periodic desludging and cleaning (6-12 monthly). Sullage pump-out systems discharging surface are not permitted on new installations unless it is further treated by an approved household sewage treatment plant.
8. Keep the grass well mown in the trench area and keep vehicular traffic and large animals well clear.
9. Grease traps where installed, require regular servicing. It is recommended that a council approved septage carrier be engaged to conduct this service on a quarterly basis, depending on the loading. The waste disposal is not to cause an environmental or health nuisance.
10. Garbage grinders are not permitted to be installed on septic systems.
11. Keep water usage to a minimum and have leaky taps repaired promptly.