

Septic Tanks

SEPTIC TANKS

Septic tanks are essential for the treatment of wastewater for more than 250,000 households in Victoria.

Given the large number of these wastewater systems, effective management is essential to ensure that public health and the environment are protected.

CODE OF PRACTICE

EPA's *Code of Practice for Septic Tanks* provides guidance on planning, installing, operating and maintaining septic tanks.

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A 'life cycle' approach ensures that wastewater management is considered as early as possible in the land use planning process, maximising the system's effectiveness and minimising impact on public health and environment.

In addition the code identifies the roles and responsibilities of the different groups in managing septic tanks, such as the local council, and includes advice on specific technical issues.

To assist in this management EPA's information bulletin *Land Capability Assessment for Onsite Domestic Wastewater Management* provides guidance about how to assess the suitability of a site for septic tanks.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Domestic Wastewater Management Series: EPA's Certificate of Approval System, EPA Publication 748

Septic Tanks Code of Practice, EPA Publication 891

Use of Reclaimed Water – Guidelines for Environmental Management EPA Publication 464.1

Code of Practice for Small Wastewater Treatment Plants, EPA Publication 500

Development Approvals in Sewered and Unsewered Areas, EPA Publication 629

Land Capability Assessment for Onsite Domestic Wastewater Management, EPA Publication 746.1



INSTALLING, OPERATING AND MAINTAINING SEPTIC TANKS



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Installing, operating and maintaining septic tanks

INSTALLING A SEPTIC TANK

All septic tank systems* installed in Victoria must be of a type approved by EPA and hold a current certificate of approval. The local council must issue a permit for the installation of each individual system.

Installers must ensure that the system meets the:

- EPA Certificate of Approval for the particular system being installed;
- septic tank permit issued by the council;
- manufacturer's specifications; and
- Victorian plumbing regulations.

Anyone engaging a contractor to install a septic tank system should ensure the contractor follows the requirements outlined in the code of practice and holds suitable insurance.

A current list of EPA approved wastewater systems is available through the local government section of EPA's website at www.epa.vic.gov.au/Localgov/

The Plumbing Industry Commission can confirm if a plumber is accredited/licensed to install a septic tank system (telephone 9889 2211 or country callers 1800 015 129).

*The *Environment Protection Act 1970* refers to all onsite wastewater treatment systems (systems treating less than 5000 litres per day of wastewater) as 'septic tank systems'. This definition is used in this publication.

CARE AND OPERATION OF SEPTIC TANKS

- Restrict the use of germicides (such as strong detergents, disinfectants, toilet cleaners and bleaches), as they will kill the bacteria which makes the septic tank work.
- Use soapy water to clean toilets and other fixtures
- Use only detergents that have low alkaline salts and chlorine levels.
- Odours may occur on installation or after addition of large quantity of germicide. If this happens, flush a cup of lime down the toilet each day until odours abate.
- Use of proprietary or chemical additives is not recommended at any time for septic systems – except for lime when used to remove odours.
- Do not flush sanitary napkins or disposable nappies down the system.
- Minimise the amounts of oil and fat flushed into the system.
- Use a sink strainer to restrict food scraps entering the septic system. Do not use garbage disposal units.
- Fill tank with water to reduce odours on start up or after desludging tanks. They should not be washed or disinfected after desludging.
- Ensure the tank and disposal field are not built over or disturbed.
- Inspect the system at least annually and desludge the tank at least once every three years, or as otherwise directed by the council.

Typically, households generate about 1000 litres a day of wastewater. As wastewater generation varies, septic tanks need to be designed and installed by taking into account factors such as the number of occupants and the efficiency with which water is used.

SEPTIC TANK MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST

- Keep a record of all maintenance (including tank pump-outs and the location of the system, tank inspection and access openings) and send copies of the maintenance reports to the local council in accordance with the septic tank permit and EPA certificate of approval.
- Do not add to or alter any part of your system without council approval.
- Ensure that only suitably trained persons work on the system.
- Check sludge level, pumps and alarms regularly.
- Arrange for an inspection of the system, at least annually.
- Desludge the tank at least every three years or as required by council.

because this is our home