MARLBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Looking after your septic tank

Helpful tips

Resource consents

Discharge permits

If you reside in and around the Marlborough Sounds or within a soil sensitive area, you will likely hold a discharge permit for your onsite wastewater management system. Contact Council if you are unsure if you are within a soil sensitive area. Discharge permits are granted with a 15-year consent term as this reflects the lifetime of such systems. If you have a current discharge permit and you have been notified that it is about to expire, contact Council if you are unsure as to whether a replacement consent is required.

If a replacement consent is required, a report prepared by an accredited site and soil evaluator will need to be provided within the application for resource consent. Site and soil evaluations are required to be undertaken as part of the process of designing new on-site systems and assessing existing systems.

Keep your tank healthy

The septic tank removed solids present in the domestic wastewater, allowing the remaining liquid to pass through into the land application area. There are bacteria present in the wastewater that breakdown this solid material, turning it into a liquid sludge. Household cleaners, strong detergents and other chemicals can kill these “good” bacteria.

Keeping the good bacteria alive

1. Check all household cleaners to see if they are suitable for use with septic tanks.
2. Use bio-degradable soaps.
3. Use low phosphorus detergents.
4. Use detergents in the recommended quantities.
5. Use biodegradable substitutes.

Don’t

1. Use bleaches, whiteners, nappy soakers, stain removers or disinfectants.
2. Put chemicals, pesticides, oil, or paint down the drain.

Council has another brochure on the household cleaners and septic tanks, this looks at the effect of cleaning agents on septic tanks and provides biodegradable substitutes for these cleaning agents.

Reduce the liquid load into the tank

Most water used in your household or holiday home ends up the septic tank as wastewater. If less water is used, the wastewater is retained in the tank longer, providing more time for the solids to settle.

Reduce the liquid load into the tank

1. Install water reduction fixtures, such as duel flush toilets, low flow shower heads and spray nozzle taps.
2. Have showers instead of baths.
3. Place a brick or water filled plastic bottle in your toilet cistern.
4. Fix leaking taps.

Don't

1. Wash your clothes or use the dishwasher until you have a full load.
2. Do multiple loads in succession.
3. Run the washing machine and dishwasher at the same time.
4. Let surface water enter the septic tank.

A reduction in water use will also improve the performance of the land application area by reducing the amount of wastewater that needs to be discharged into the soil. This is particularly important if the land application area in prone to being wet.

Reduce the solid load into the tank

Solid material in wastewater settles on the bottom of the septic tank, where it forms liquid sludge, while fats float to the top to form a crust. The more solids that enter the tank, the quicker the sludge crust build up.

Sludge and scum need to be removed from the septic tank periodically. If this does not occur, the wastewater will not be retained in the tank for sufficient time to allow the solids to settle out. The solids will then flow over into the land application area.

Inorganic material (such as plastics) will not be broken down within the septic tank.

Reduce the amount of solids entering the system

1. Scrape all dishes to remove fats and grease prior to washing
2. Shake all sand and dirt from clothes before you wash them.

Don't

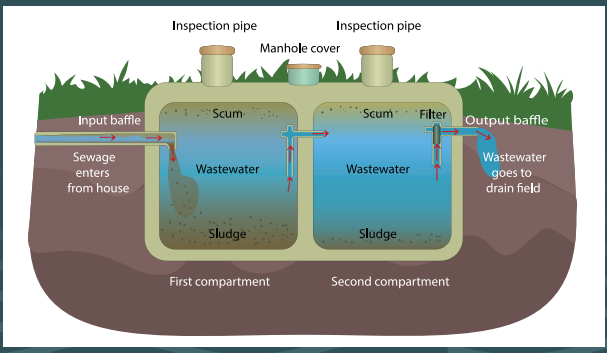
1. Install or use a waste disposal unit in your kitchen sink.
2. Put sanitary pads, tampons, disposable nappies, condoms, or coffee grinds into the system.

How an on-site wastewater management system works

On-site wastewater management systems are used to manage watewater from households and holiday homes where no reticulated sewerage system is available. Although there are a great variety of systems currently available, all consist of two essential parts: the treatment unit and the land application area.

Treatment Unit

The treatment unit functions to separate the solids from the liquids and to breakdown organic matter within the wastewater. The most common form of treatment unit is the septic tank. Wastewater from the kitchen, toilet, bathroom and laundry is directed into the septic tank. The heavier solids then settle at the bottom of the tank, while fats float to the top. The liquids flow out of the tank and into the land application area.



Land application area

The wastewater from the treatment unit is discharged into the soil via trenches, beds, mounds, or dripper lines. The area into which the wastewater is discharged is called the land application area. The wastewater still contains harmful bacteria nutrients at this stage. Biological activity acts to provide essential further treatment as the wastewater passes through the soil.

Septic tank failure

The less solids that enter the septic tank, the less frequently you will need to arrange to have the sludge removed. For a septic tank serving a typical three-bedroom household, the sludge should be removed at least every five years.

System failure can occur due to the septic tank being full of sludge and scum or the land application area becoming clogged.
Signs of failure include:

- The land application area is wet or soggy, or wastewater is ponding on the ground surface.
- There is an unpleasant 'sewage' smell near the septic tank or land application area.
- The drains and toilets run slowly.

A failed septic tank or land application area can create a serious health risk or adverse effects on the surrounding environment, including the spread of infectious diseases and the contamination of water within nearby creeks, coastal water, or underlying groundwater. Action must be taken to rectify system failure immediately. You will need to engage an experienced person to assist you with this task.

Further information

marlborough.govt.nz

For a list of accredited soil and site evaluators:
bit.ly/3GJ6rDz

The Proposed Marlborough Environment Plan (PMEP) details solutions to prevent or minimise issues around these discharges to land. These then guide the rules and associated standards that apply within the individual zones:
bit.ly/3uj7wYM

To view the chapter of the PMEP on waste:
bit.ly/3idLR4h