

Maintaining system health

There are a number of other things you, can do to maintain a healthy onsite wastewater management system.

Avoid or minimise cleaning agents, detergents, disinfectants, bleaches, alkalis, oil, paint, petrol, acids, degreasers, photographic chemicals, cosmetics, lotions, pesticides and herbicides. Even small amounts of these chemicals can upset chemical and biological activity within the system.

Do not place disposable nappies, tissues, sanitary napkins, tampons, paper towels, plastics, cigarette butts, bones, coffee grinds into the system. These materials can potentially overload the system or cause pump failure.

Do not use the treated water to water vegetable gardens, fill swimming pools, or other domestic purposes.

Do not put fats and oils down drains and sinks

Do practice water conservation to avoid overloading your system

Do monitor your system for signs of ill-health including: unusual or foul odours, leaks or overflow from the tank, pooling of wastes or liquid in and around the disposal area. Contact your service technician if you think there is a problem with your system.

Do use products that are labelled as biodegradable or septic-safe

Do use alternative cleaning products such as bicarbonate of soda, pure soap, borax, vinegar, lemon juice, cloudy ammonia etc.

Please be aware that taking some medications (such as antibiotics) may also impact on the effectiveness of your system.

Approval to operate

The NSW Government introduced the SepticSafe Program in 1998 to help property owners and Councils keep onsite sewage management systems working efficiently and safely. All owners of onsite sewage management systems are now required to apply to Council for an Approval to Operate (license). This Approval is a means to assist Council monitor and manage the cumulative impact of sewage pollution in local areas. The Approval also ensures that property owners are aware of their responsibility to efficiently operate and regularly maintain their system.

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from;
Environment & Health Protection Guidelines—

On-site Sewage Management for Single Households

Lithgow City Council website

www.lithgow.nsw.gov.au/

Water for Life

www.waterforlife.nsw.gov.au/

NSW Health

www.health.nsw.gov.au/

Sydney Catchment Authority

www.sca.nsw.gov.au/

Department of Water & Energy

www.dwe.nsw.gov.au/

Water Efficient Products

www.waterrating.gov.au/products/index.html



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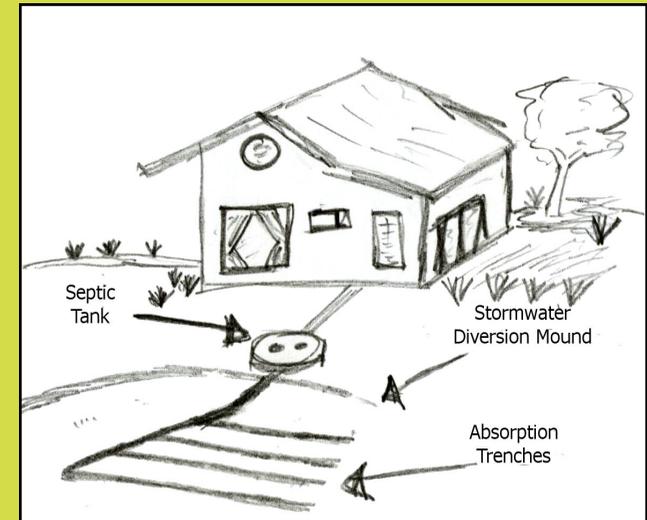
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Septic Tank & Absorption Trench

Lithgow City Council



Health Warning

Effluent from any septic system may be a health hazard. Children and/or pets should not play in the absorption or spray field areas.

Help Protect our environment

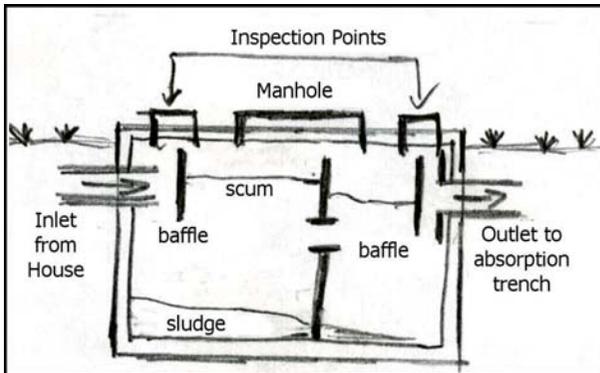
Your septic system has an effect on the environment. By ensuring that your septic system is working correctly you can do your part in helping to protect our environment.



Looking after your septic tank & absorption trench

How does your septic tank work?

Your septic system treats your household wastewater by temporarily storing it in the septic tank where heavy solids and scum (oils and grease) are allowed to separate. Solids collect on the bottom of the tank as sludge, and the scum floats to the top of the wastewater. This separation process is known as primary treatment. The sludge stored in the septic tank is decomposed by bacteria and later pumped out, along with the scum.

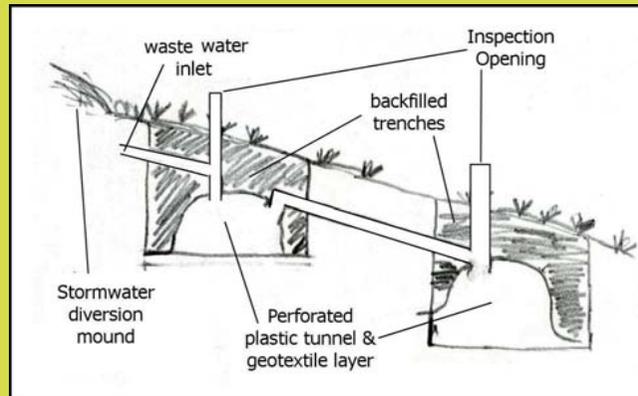


What is an absorption trench?

In a conventional septic tank and absorption trench system, wastewater is gravity-fed or pumped from the septic tank/s to the absorption area. Trenches are usually constructed below ground surfaces and consist of a durable self supporting arch, gravel or sand. Typically trenches will be from 300 to 900mm deep, and both the depth and overall length will be governed by soil type and anticipated wastewater volume.

How does an absorption trench work?

In septic tank and absorption trench systems, household wastewater first flows into a primary septic tank where solids settle to the tank bottom to form a sludge layer, and greases and fats float to the surface to form a scum layer. Clarified effluent then flows, or is pumped, to the absorption trench for treatment and disposal. The effluent is typically distributed the length of the trench via pipes, and filters through the gravel and sand to the underlying soil.



The filtering process in the trenches allows for the removal of pathogens, toxins and other pollutants. Nutrients within the wastewater are alternatively taken up by vegetation (normally grass) planted across the surface of the trench.

Please note that the septic tank and absorption trench systems have the potential to contaminate groundwater and are not recommended in sensitive locations or in areas with heavy clay or shallow soils.

Maintaining your absorption trench

Even a well designed and properly operating septic tank and absorption trench system will eventually fail, if it is not maintained. Regular maintenance is essential in prolonging the life of your absorption trench and avoiding any costly repairs.

The following tips will help in ensuring that your system continues to operate efficiently:

- Do not** plant trees or shrubs on top of the septic tank or absorption trench;
- Do not** park vehicles or build structures on top of the absorption trench or allow stock to graze over the area;
- Ensure** stormwater is diverted away from the absorption trench;
- Ensure** that your septic tank is regularly desludged;
- Maintain** grass cover on the surface of the trench to allow uptake of nutrients;
- Minimise** the use of strong detergents, bleaches and disinfectants around the home; and
- Ensure** that you regularly inspect your septic system.

The following warning signs will indicate that your system is not working well:

- Gurgling sounds in the plumbing;
- Sluggish flow when flushing the toilet;
- Backup of sewage in house plumbing.
- Soggy grass in the area above or near the absorption trench during dry periods;

Should you notice any of these signs, contact a licensed plumber immediately