

## On-site Sewage Management Systems Information Guide

Council is committed to managing the local environment and protecting public health. Certain lands within the Northern Beaches Local Government Area (LGA) do not have access to the Sydney Water Sewerage System and are therefore reliant on providing on-site sewage management systems (OSMS) to treat and dispose of sewage.

### Examples of common on-site sewage management systems

- septic tank and absorption trenches
- septic tank to pump-out
- aerated wastewater treatment systems
- composting toilets
- chemical toilets

Any other system which stores, treats and/or disposes of sewage and wastewater on-site is also classified as an OSMS.

### Inspection Program

Council operates an inspection program to ensure systematic and ongoing management of sewage management systems. Inspections are conducted on risk-based principles.

It must be acknowledged that even a system that is achieving optimal performance may pose a potential risk to public health and the environment if it is located in a range of extremely sensitive environments. For this reason, a distinction is made between high-risk areas and high-risk systems. Although high-risk areas for onsite sewage disposal are common in Northern Beaches, high-risk systems are not acceptable and may be required to be upgraded.

Risk rating of areas and systems are determined via desktop investigations and system inspections.

### Notification of Inspection

Property owners are given two (2) weeks notification (in writing) of Council's intention to inspect their OSMS. If the owner wishes to be present at the time of inspection, they will be given an opportunity to contact Council and arrange a mutually suitable time for the inspection to take place during regular business hours.

When a Council Officer attends a property and is unable to gain access to the OSMS or complete an inspection, the property owner will be contacted and a suitable time arranged for the inspection to be completed.

In circumstances whereby Council Officers are investigating legitimate complaints related to failing systems, Officers may contact the owner to arrange a meeting at the property. Officers can exercise powers of entry to enter the premises to investigate pollution complaints under Section 191 of the *Local Government Act 1993* or Section 196 of the *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997*.

### **Risk Categories and Frequency of Inspections**

The performance and potential pollution risk of the individual sewage management system to the environment and public health, along with its location (i.e. proximity to waterways or area of site), will determine the frequency of inspections. The risk categories are as follows:

1. *High Risk* systems or systems in high-risk areas will be given an “approval to operate” after an successful inspection for one (1) year, and may be subject to inspections during the duration of the approval to monitor the operation of the system, follow up on complaints and respond to unfavourable servicing reports submitted to Council by wastewater servicing technicians;
2. *Medium Risk* systems will be given an “approval to operate” after an successful inspection for three (3) years and will be subject to inspections during the duration when complaints are received, or when Council receives unfavourable servicing reports; and
3. *Low Risk systems* will be given an “approval to operate” after an successful inspection for five (5) years, and will be subject to inspections during the duration when complaints are received, or when Council receives unfavourable servicing reports.

Applying the abovementioned risk categories means more frequent inspections and application renewals for OSMS’ that have failed and/or are located in a particularly sensitive area. Council will assign risk categories at designate renewal times, following inspections and can change them with improvements or upgraded systems.

With regard to the expiry of an “approval to operate”, Council will send out a reminder letter for renewal, and an inspection may be conducted and the approved fee is to be paid.

### **Former Pittwater Area**

Whilst Council previously accepted plumbers’ reports in lieu of Council inspection in the former Pittwater area (due to insufficient Council resources), this approach was inconsistent with the rest of the Northern Beaches and other NSW Councils. A determination was made to revert to an inspection and approval process more consistent with the Local Government Act, which was in place prior to 2013, in the former Pittwater Council.

### **Fees and Charges**

To contribute to the costs of implementing this program, 2018/19 Fees and Charges are as follows:

#### Commercial Systems (not accredited by NSW Health)

---

t 1300 434 434  
e council@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au  
northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au  
PO Box 1336 Dee Why  
ABN 57 284 295 198

Dee Why Office:  
725 Pittwater Road  
Dee Why NSW 2099  
DX 9118 Dee Why  
f 02 9971 4522

Mona Vale Office:  
1 Park Street  
Mona Vale NSW 2103  
DX 9018 Mona Vale  
f 02 9970 1200

Manly Office:  
1 Belgrave Street  
Manly NSW 2095  
f 02 9976 1400

Approval to operate an on-site sewage management system - \$315

Approval to install an on-site sewage management system- \$420

#### Domestic systems

Approval to operate (accredited) sewage systems - \$260

Approval to operate sewage systems (pensioner fee) - with evidence - \$85

Approval to install an on-site sewage system - \$350

Fees for follow-up inspections may be charged if continued non-compliance occurs. Fees and charges are revised on an annual basis, set-out in Council's 'Fees and Charges' document.

### **Connection to the Sydney Water Sewer**

Premises located within 75 metres from the Sydney Water Sewer are required to connect. If the property owner disagrees with a direction by Council to connect to sewer, standard compliance procedures will apply whereby property owners may make representations to Council to be considered by our Officers.

### **Legislation**

Section 68 of the *Local Government Act 1993* (the Act) requires Council to approve installation and operation of on-site sewage management systems. Although approvals under Section 68 of the *LGA 1993* are separate to "development application" approvals under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, Council may request that section 68 approvals are required as a condition of development consent under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

The relevant legislation, standards and guidelines are listed below:

- Local Government Act 1993;
- Local Government (General) Regulation 2005;
- Environment and Health Protection Guidelines: On-site Sewage Management for Single Households (DLG 1998);
- Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZ 1547:2012: On-site domestic-wastewater management;
- Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979; and
- Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997.
- Plumbing and Drainage Code AS3500

## Compliance

The following tools may be used by authorised officers where systems are failing or operating without approvals:

- Warning letters;
- Orders 15, 21, 22, 24, 25 & 30 under the *Local Government Act 1993* (usually preceded by Notices of Intention to Issue an Order);
- Clean Up Notices and Prevention Notices under the *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997*;
- Penalty Infringement Notices (PIN) under *Local Government Act 1993* for operating sewage management system without approval, operating sewage management system otherwise than as approved, and not complying with an order (\$330 each PIN);
- PINs under the *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997* for 'Pollute waters' (\$4000 - Individual/\$8000 - Corporation), 'Fail to comply with clean-up/prevention notice' (\$4000 - Individual/\$8000 - Corporation), and 'Fail to pay clean-up/prevention notice fee' (\$500 - Individual/1000 - Corporation); and
- Prosecution under both Section 627 of the *Local Government Act 1993* and *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997*.

## Aerated Wastewater Treatment Systems (AWTS)

Aerated wastewater treatment systems (such as 'Envirocycle' and 'Clearwater') use sensitive biological agents, mechanical systems and chemical processes to produce a higher quality effluent than a standard septic tank. Aerated systems must be carefully managed and serviced to keep them working well and safely.

Service agents currently check the internal components, but do not always check the public health and environmental impacts of effluent disposal, changes in site conditions or missing signage. Unlike standard septic systems, aerated systems often discharge effluent above ground where it can easily run-off into adjoining land and waterways. Should the treatment process fail, aerated systems can become serious sewage pollution hazards. Such failures are all too common, and may be caused by quite simple factors like using the wrong type of household cleaning agents, leaving the system unattended for extended periods, excess hydraulic loading or depletion of the treatment chemicals.

Landowners with aerated systems have to register for Council approval in the same way as other septic system owners. Council does not intend to undertake the service of AWTS systems but reviews the agent reports. It is mandatory for your service agent to provide the report to Council within two weeks of the service being completed.

Forms and information are available on Council's website, [www.northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au](http://www.northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au). For further information please contact Council on 1300 434 434 or email [council@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au) with further enquiries.