



TOWARDS BETTER ONSITE WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT IN VICTORIA - COMMUNITY EDUCATION SERIES

FACT SHEET 5: SPLIT SYSTEMS (SEPTIC AND GREY WATER SYSTEMS)

This information will be of interest to you, if you live on a property that is not connected to a reticulated or town sewerage system and has a split system to dispose of your wastewater. Split systems are historically a very common method of managing domestic wastewater. These systems act to split the management and disposal of grey water from black water.



5.1 SO, WHAT IS GREY WATER?

Grey water is wastewater from domestic premises that does not contain faecal contaminants or urine. In most instances, grey water is produced by showers, washing machines, sinks and basins, baths and troughs. Although grey water does not contain faecal waste, it is still extremely dangerous to the health of the

public and the natural environment. Grey water contains extremely high concentrations of nutrient and organic contaminants that can be very toxic if they are not managed appropriately. Beware that wastewater produced by washing nappies is black water as it is contaminated with faecal waste.

5.2 BLACK WATER SYSTEM COMPONENTS:

Frequently, the black water component of split systems is managed by a conventional septic tank system. Please refer to Fact Sheet 1: Septic Tanks

and Absorption Trenches for further information on these components.

5.3 APPROVED DISPOSAL METHODS FOR GREY WATER:

Due to the hazards presented by grey water, there are particular legal requirements for its disposal. Below is a list of prohibited uses and disposal methods for grey water so that you can ensure everything is done by the book.

DON'T'S FOR GREY WATER. GREY WATER MUST:

- Not be stored for longer than 24 hours without adequate water quality treatment by an approved grey water treatment system;
- Not be used for toilet flushing or any internal household use without adequate water quality treatment by an approved grey water treatment system and prior approval by your local council;
- Not be discharged to the surface of the ground. This grey water must be disposed through an approved sub-surface disposal system if stored for longer than 24 hours;
- Not be discharged beyond the bounds of your allotment (see next section);
- Not be introduced back into the black water components of a split system. The black water components of most split systems are only designed to manage the calculated black water volumes. If grey water is introduced into this section, it will flood the system and cost you a significant amount of money and time in repairs to the system.

5.4 KEEP YOUR WASTEWATER ON YOUR PROPERTY!

If you have an ageing split system on a small block, it is likely that your wastewater management system was designed to discharge wastewater offsite. This is an historic method of designing wastewater systems that was frequently employed in townships with small lots. Systems designed in this way commonly discharge to the kerbside gutter.

This method of offsite discharge is now no longer permitted as there is a significant risk presented to the natural environment and the health of the public. However, there is no need to panic just yet. If your system has been designed in this way, it is unlikely that you will be required to change it unless one or more of the following circumstances arises:

- Your system fails and requires repair or replacement;
- The risk of environmental degradation or health impacts becomes too great;
- A reticulated sewer becomes available in your area;
- You alter your house design or any plumbing fixtures attached to your septic tank system;
- Your wastewater system no longer meets water quality standards it is required to achieve, or;
- You have been given an order by your local government or other relevant wastewater or environment protection agency to upgrade the wastewater management system.

Therefore, it is in your interest to maintain your wastewater management system to the highest standard possible in order to protect the natural environment, your community, your family's health, and your hip-pocket.

5.5 SIMPLE STEPS TO A HEALTHY FAMILY, ENVIRONMENT, AND WALLET.

- Do not divert grey water back into the black water tank unless the system has been designed to manage the consequent volume of wastewater;
- Black water must never be diverted through any elements of the grey water system;
- Ensure the septic tank is inspected regularly by licensed plumbing practitioners to check the scum and sludge levels, and the presence of blockages in the outlet and inlet pipes;
- Keep a record of pump outs, inspections and other maintenance activities;
- Check the household products that you use are suitable for disposal through a septic tank - bleaches, disinfectants or nappy soakers can all affect the operation of the septic tank;
- Use biodegradable liquid detergents, i.e. concentrates with low phosphorus and sodium;
- Ensure that the septic tank and grey water components are mosquito proofed;
- Do not put rubbish such as sanitary napkins, condoms or disposable nappies down the toilet;
- Do not alter any part of your system without Council approval. Your septic tank system has been designed for a particular amount of wastewater. Be careful not to overload the system by increasing wastewater flow rates;
- Spread your laundry cycles throughout the week to reduce the disruption of the settling process by peak wastewater flows.

5.6 WHO TO CONTACT:



PRODUCED AND FUNDED BY:



* ALL WASTEWATER IS TO BE RETAINED ON THE PROPERTY