

My septic tank system smells, is this normal?

Yes. It is normal for septic tanks to give off odours from time to time. If your system is giving off odours, check that all inspection openings and the lids are sealed properly.

If odour is a constant problem you can try flushing a cup of garden lime into the toilet each day.

If odour does not cease after two weeks, you should engage a plumber that specialises or has experience with septic tank systems to have a look at the system.

My septic tank is blocked, what should I do?

The most common blockage for septic tank systems is at the inlet point of the tank. Most septic systems have an inspection opening near the front of the tank. Plunging this point may release blockages into the tank and relieve the problem. If this does not work, you should engage a plumber that specialises or has experience with septic tank systems to have a look at the system.

A lot of septic tank systems will have an alarm installed. Alarms are generally found on any system that contains a pump, sand filters, and AWTS. These alarms can be in the form of a flashing light or a float alarm where a stick will extend into the air to indicate there is a problem.

If your alarm is activated this means that something with the system is not working and you should engage a plumber as soon as possible to ensure no permanent or further damage occurs.

What is Council's audit program?

In 2015, Council adopted a Domestic Wastewater Management Plan. This plan includes an audit program for existing onsite wastewater systems located throughout the Shire. As an action of this plan, Council conducts random inspections of approximately 50 properties per year. The inspection audit program gathers information on the location of tanks (where Council has no records), and ensures septic tanks aren't discharging effluent offsite, causing a risk to the occupiers or a risk to the community. Where public health risks are identified, Council Officers work with the owner/s to identify the best solution. A letter is sent to property owners directly prior to any audit notifying them that the visit will be occurring.

If you need to install a new septic tank system or seek to alter an existing system, more detailed information can be found on Council's website. Follow the link to our septic tank page where you will find a document titled 'Septic Tank Application Guide'. Alternatively you are encouraged to call and speak to a member of the Environmental Health team.



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SEPTIC TANKS



In Golden Plains Shire there are three areas serviced by reticulated sewerage. These areas are Bannockburn (South of the railway line), Smythesdale and Enfield. For properties located outside of these areas all wastewater needs to be serviced by an onsite septic tank system.

Installing new septic systems

Do I need a permit for a septic tank system?

Yes. Any onsite septic tank system requires a 'Permit to install' and a 'Certificate to Use', these approvals are issued by Council. It is the responsibility of the property owner to ensure that the system is maintained in accordance with Environment Protection Authority (EPA) requirements and permit conditions.

Are there different types of systems?

There are a number of different types of septic tank systems available due to advances in technology. The most common systems installed in Golden Plains Shire are conventional septic tanks (gravity or pumped systems), sand filters or Aerated Wastewater Treatment Systems (AWTS).

Insurance

As a home owner, check with your insurance company that your septic tank system and components are covered under your policy. This is important to ensure that you are covered in an event such as a flood or fire where your system is damaged and requires upgrade or replacement.



Existing septic systems

Where is my septic tank system?

Knowing the location of your system is important for maintenance purposes and to ensure that:

- No structures are built over the system i.e. sheds, driveways, paths, garden beds, etc.
- No large plants are near or over the system (roots can cause blockages).
- No vehicles drive over the system.
- Livestock are prevented access to the area where the system is located.

Council maintains records on all septic tank permits issued and can provide copies of old permits and plans.

Parts of tanks are often above ground, so you may locate your septic by looking for access lids. Alternatively, a plumber can assist you to locate different parts of the system. If you are in a rental property, your property manager may be able to provide you with information on the system.

What maintenance is required?

All systems need to be maintained. Your permit should contain specific details on what maintenance is required for your system. Regular maintenance will ensure that the system does not fail and require costly repairs or in some cases replacement of parts of the system.

Generally the following maintenance is required:

- Conventional septic tank systems should be checked on an annual basis by a maintenance contractor. Pump out is required when the tank is half full of solid material.
- AWTS systems are required to be serviced by an accredited service technician (usually every 3 months).

What can go into my septic tank system?

An important part of looking after your septic tank system is to be careful about what goes into the system. The following things can be done in the home to look after your septic system:

- Repair leaking taps and toilets
- Install water efficient appliances and fixtures
- Use your washing machine regularly throughout the week (not multiple loads in one day)
- Only use the dishwasher and washing machine when there is a full load
- Install low-flow taps and shower heads
- Install front loader washing machines
- Install dual flush toilets
- Ensure detergents and washing powders are low in phosphorous and sodium. Avoid using harsh cleaning chemicals such as bleach and caustic sodas. Chemicals that are biodegradable or labelled 'septic safe' are preferable.
- Install a lint filter on your washing machine and regularly clean it.
- Using a sink strainer and dispose of solid food waste by other methods (i.e. rubbish/compost).
- Do not install food waste disposal units.
- Do not pour fats and oils down the sink.
- Wiping grease out of pans and dishes before washing them in the sink.
- Do not flush rubbish down the toilet i.e. sanitary items, condoms, nappies, baby wipes, cat litter etc.