

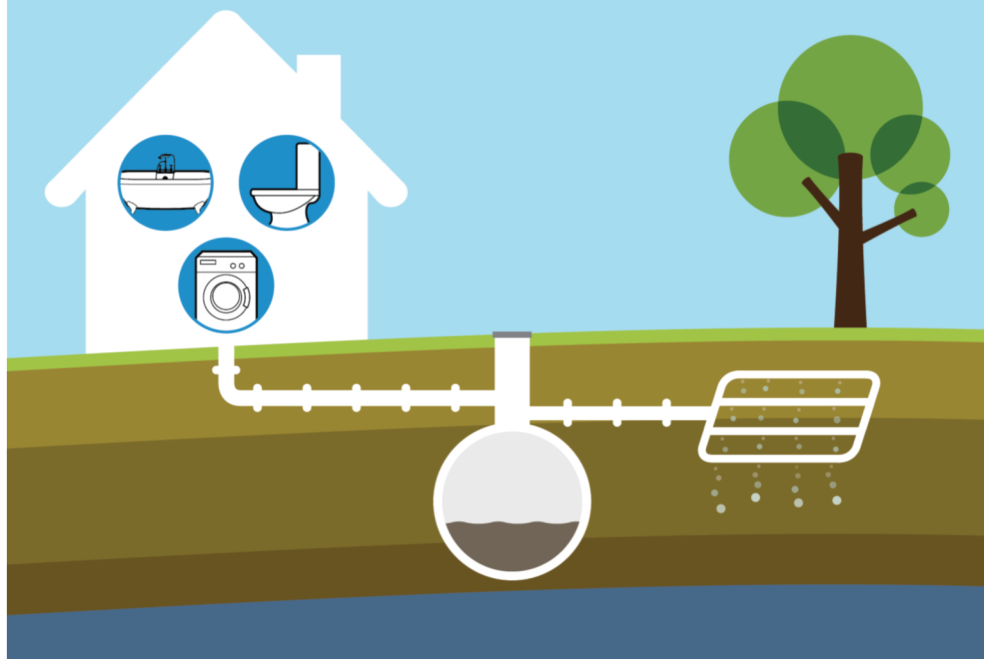


Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs



Environment  
Agency

# Your sewage – Your environment



Important information for  
households and businesses with  
**septic tanks** and **small sewage  
treatment plants**

# Rules for using septic tanks & small sewage treatment plants

In January 2015, new rules were introduced that simplify the way septic tanks and small sewage treatment plants are regulated in England, protecting the environment and improving water quality.

If you have a septic tank or small sewage treatment plant, by law you must comply with the **'general binding rules'** by ensuring your system is maintained properly and does not cause pollution. Extra protection is in place in areas designated as environmentally sensitive, where people may need to apply for a **permit**.

## **What are septic tanks and small sewage treatment plants?**

If your home or business is not connected to the mains sewage system, the waste water from your toilets, baths, showers, sinks and washing machines will drain into one of the following systems:

**SEPTIC TANKS** are underground tanks where solids sink to the bottom forming sludge and the liquid flows into a drainage field where bacteria treat it as it soaks into the ground. They're not allowed to discharge into a watercourse.

**SMALL SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANTS** work in a similar way but use mechanical parts to aerate the bacteria, which makes them more effective at treating waste water and means they can discharge treated sewage into a drainage field or directly into flowing water.

**Cesspits/cesspools** are different because the raw sewage is stored in a sealed tank, rather than being treated and discharged, which means they are not covered by the general binding rules. They must be emptied when full and must not be allowed to overflow or leak.

# How to follow the rules and protect your local environment

It's easy to comply with the general binding rules. Here are the main things you need to do:

- Have your system emptied by a registered waste carrier regularly (at least once a year unless the manufacturer says otherwise) to ensure it doesn't cause pollution
- Maintain your system regularly, getting any faults or problems fixed immediately
- You are limited to discharging a maximum of 2,000 litres of treated sewage per day into the ground or 5,000 litres of treated sewage per day to flowing water. If you discharge more you will need a permit. Calculate how much your system is discharging at [www.gov.uk/small-sewage-rules](http://www.gov.uk/small-sewage-rules)
- Speak to the Environment Agency before installing a new system as you may need a permit. Speak to your local council to check your system will meet planning requirements and building regulations. Only install equipment that meets British Standard BS EN 12566
- If you sell your property, inform the buyer in writing that it has a septic tank or small sewage treatment plant

**Go to [www.gov.uk/small-sewage-rules](http://www.gov.uk/small-sewage-rules) for more information, if you are unable to follow the rules, are worried your system may be causing pollution or want to check if your system needs a permit.**

# Top tips for maintaining your septic tank or small sewage treatment plant

Maintaining your system properly will help prevent pollution, avoid costly repair bills and minimise your energy consumption. Here's how:

- Get the sludge emptied regularly by a registered waste carrier
- Get it serviced regularly by an accredited engineer and fix problems straight away
- Regularly check for signs of pollution such as sewage smells, pools of water, sludge, foam, lush weeds or grey fungus growing in your local stream or river. If you spot any of these issues call a specialist for help
- Don't flush sanitary items, nappies, 'flushable' wipes or similar objects down the toilet as they can block the system
- Don't put fats, oils or chemicals down the drain as they kill the bacteria that break-down the waste
- Use low or no-phosphate detergents, which are kinder to the environment
- Keep maintenance records so you know when to service and empty your system

## Who can help?

### **The Environment Agency:**

**Email:** [enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk)

**Telephone:** 03708 506 506 (8am to 6pm, Mon to Fri)

**Online:** [www.gov.uk/small-sewage-rules](http://www.gov.uk/small-sewage-rules)

**Incident hotline:** 0800 80 70 60 (24 hours, 7 days a week)

**Local wastewater service companies:** Find an accredited engineer and further guidance at [www.britishwater.co.uk/engineers](http://www.britishwater.co.uk/engineers)