

## General Binding Rules

These rules must be complied with by law

### Follow the law

Calculate how much your system is discharging at [www.gov.uk/small-sewage-rules](http://www.gov.uk/small-sewage-rules) – if you discharge more than 2,000 litres of treated sewage / day into the ground or 5,000 litres to flowing water, you will need a permit. If replacing or installing a new system, choose equipment that meets British Standard BS EN 12566 and speak to your local council to check that it will meet planning requirements and building regulations. You will also need to contact the Environment Agency to find out whether your new system will need a permit. Please remember that septic tanks cannot discharge to surface/flowing water.

### Fix Faults

Gurgling pipes, discoloured effluent, odours, foam, a swampy soakaway, lush grass growth, and sewage fungus (looks like grey cotton wool) in local waterways can all indicate that your system isn't working properly. Pipes can become blocked – these can be cleared with boiling water or drain rods. Fix problems immediately, preventing pollution, health risk, and escalating repair bills. Accredited engineers can fix more serious faults and carry out servicing.

### Get it emptied regularly

All systems need to be emptied of sludge on a regular basis. Frequency will depend on levels of use, and how well you treat your system, having it emptied annually by a registered waste carrier will help to ensure that it functions properly and doesn't cause pollution.

### Buyer beware

If you sell your property, you must inform the buyer in writing that it has a septic tank or small sewage treatment plant. Providing them with records and a maintenance guide will reassure them that the system isn't a liability.

The collective impact of multiple private sewerage systems has a substantial effect on local waters. Following these steps will ensure that you're minimising the nitrogen, phosphorus and other pollutants entering our waters from your home.



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### More Information

If you are unable to follow the new rules, are worried your system may be causing pollution or want to check if your system needs a permit, visit [www.gov.uk/permits-you-need-for-septic-tanks](http://www.gov.uk/permits-you-need-for-septic-tanks) or contact The Environment Agency on [enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk) or call **03708 506 506** (8am to 6pm, Mon to Fri). If you want to report a pollution incident please call the Environment Agencies incident number **0800 80 70 60** (24hrs every day of the year).

For emptying services, look online or in the Yellow Pages under:

- Septic Tanks
- Plumbers
- Drain and Pipe Cleaning
- Sewage Consultants

To find an accredited engineer and further guidance, visit [www.britishwater.co.uk/engineers](http://www.britishwater.co.uk/engineers)

If you want to know more about your local river, stream, coastline and what projects/initiatives are happening in your area, contact the Arun and Western Streams Catchment Partnership. [www.arunwesternstreams.org.uk](http://www.arunwesternstreams.org.uk)

This leaflet is supported by the following partnership members:



## Managing your septic tank and sewage treatment plant

### Could your home be polluting our rivers and streams?

Waste water from most homes and businesses flows via drains and sewers to wastewater treatment works, where it is cleaned up and returned to the environment. But not all properties benefit from this – some rely on private systems to collect and treat their waste.



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

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

**Septic tanks** are underground chambers where bacteria safely breaks down the waste before the left over liquid drains into the ground. These systems must not discharge to watercourses.

**Sewage treatment plants** work in a similar way but use powered mechanical parts to aerate the break down by bacteria. This makes them more effective at treating waste water so the treated sewage can discharge into a soakaway or directly into flowing water.

If not working properly, both systems can release raw sewage, polluting the water in the ground, in rivers and streams, and ultimately our coast. Owners can ensure that their systems are properly maintained by following best practice guidelines.

## Best Practice Guidelines

### Get to know your system

Where is your tank? A metal or concrete lid should be visible, usually in the ground downhill from your property. Is it shared? Ask your neighbours. Where does it discharge to? Locate your soakaway. This gravel or grassed area cleans and filters the liquid effluent from your tank.

### Check your system

Check that the soakaway isn't waterlogged, and that there are no pools of water running in to ditches or watercourses. Effluent inside the inspection chamber should be clear or pale, and odour-free.

### Don't upset the balance

Using products marked as 'suitable for septic tanks' or 'environmentally friendly' will keep the bacteria in your tank healthy and effective in treating your waste. Avoid chemicals like bleach, caustic soda, disinfectants and anti-bacterials, and use cleaning products and detergents sparingly. Domestic sewage systems can't remove phosphates from effluent, using phosphate-free products will help to protect your local rivers and streams.

### Don't over-water!

Large volumes of water can overwhelm your tank, flushing out untreated sewage. Ensure that roof gutters aren't connected to your system, and avoid running dishwashers and washing machines several times in one day. Swimming pool drain down water and backwash water should not go through your septic tank.

### Bin your waste

Household waste can block and damage your system and should be binned instead of flushed. Kitchen towels, 'flushable' wipes, tissues, cotton buds, nappies and sanitary items will all block your tank or pipes. Oils and fat solidify and block pipes and soakaways. Use a kitchen sink strainer to prevent food waste filling up your tank. Paints, solvents and chemicals can all kill your tank bacteria and should be disposed of at a civic amenity site.

### Keep good records

Keeping a record of maintenance, emptying and servicing will help contractors to fix any problems that arise, and will be useful if you want to sell your home.

