

## Plan carefully

Septic tanks and disposal systems should be located in garden, lawn, and vegetated areas and be kept clear of the following:

- vehicles, driveways and car parks
- paved, sealed or gravel surfaces
- areas subject to long periods of shade, inundation or stormwater run-off
- stormwater systems
- swimming pools
- tennis courts
- buildings, decking, garages and carports
- underground service pipes for gas, electricity, phone, water and drainage
- fruit or vegetables grown for human consumption
- livestock
- water bores

## Landscape your property wisely

Keep lids and system inspection points clear and easily accessible. Don't place tannin or tan bark over them. Don't water the garden or wash the car near the absorption trench.

You can grow small shrubs and plants over the absorption or sand filter area but root systems from large trees can crack pipes and should be avoided.

Listed below are plants that are recommended:

- Cannas
- Hosta
- Zenobia
- Baura sessiliflora
- Leycesteria
- Hembrocallis
- Dwarf salvia
- Melaluca gibbosa
- Bonfire salvia
- Heleniums
- Japanese anemones
- Japanese irises
- N.Z. Flax
- Almia angustifolia
- Sprengelia



Mansfield Shire

## What causes problems for my OWMS?

### The tank contains too much scum and sludge

If the tank doesn't get pumped out, solids will flow out of it and block your absorption trenches, pumps or sand filter.

**Solution:** De-sludge your system every three years, or more frequently for high usage.

### Overloading the system with water

High water usage causes water to flow quickly through the septic tank before the bacteria can treat the waste. This is common in holiday homes.

**Solution:** Use less water and install water efficient fixtures.

If you have any further queries don't hesitate to

## Contact our Environmental Health Team

environmentalhealth@mansfield.vic.gov.au  
03 5775 8555

# Septic Health information booklet

A guide to keeping your Onsite Wastewater  
System (OWMS) healthy



Mansfield Shire

Council offices are open Monday to Friday between  
8.30am and 4.30pm

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## How does an OWMS work?

When you flush the toilet, have a shower or wash dishes the wastewater goes through pipes into a treatment tank to improve the water quality through biological and chemical processes. The wastewater is then disposed of on each property into a subsurface effluent disposal area. The wastewater is further treated by reactions occurring in the soil, and is absorbed by plants and the atmosphere. The water exiting the treatment tank is not the same quality as tap water so you should be careful about how you reuse it.

## Do I have an OWMS?

Many properties in our Shire are not connected to sewerage. When purchasing land within the Shire you should find out if a sewer network is available by contacting Goulburn Valley Water on (03) 5832 4800. It is your responsibility as the property owner to find out whether the property is seweraged or has an OWMS. In areas where there is no sewer, an approved, suitably designed OWMS must be installed and maintained in accordance with the Shire's permit conditions. You can apply for a copy of your OWMS permit at [environmentalhealth@mansfield.vic.gov.au](mailto:environmentalhealth@mansfield.vic.gov.au)

## Do I need an OWMS system?

The Shire requires all proposed residential developments to connect to the available sewer network unless an OWMS system has been or will be installed meeting the Environment Protection Authority's Onsite Wastewater Management Guidelines. To confirm if your property is in an area with a sewer network contact Goulburn Valley Water at [mail@gvwater.vic.gov.au](mailto:mail@gvwater.vic.gov.au)

## How do I apply to install an OWMS?

A 'Permit to Install' must be obtained from Council before commencing construction or altering an existing system. Council inspects the system during installation to ensure it has been installed correctly and will then issue a 'Permit to Use'. To find out more about the permit process, visit [mansfield.vic.gov.au/Plan-Build/Wastewater-Septic-Tanks](http://mansfield.vic.gov.au/Plan-Build/Wastewater-Septic-Tanks)

## How do I maintain my OWMS?

Looking after your OWMS can prevent problems and save on costly repairs and early replacement.

You should know where your system is and at least once a year take the time to consider the health of that system. Helpful information on your obligations will also be stated on your permit conditions.

### Different OWMS and maintenance requirements

#### Septic tank

- Service tank every three years
- Desludge every three years

#### Sand filter

- Annual service/check
- Desludge every three years
- Replace sand filter every 15 years

#### Mechanical treatment plant

- Quarterly service by approved service agent
- Desludge every three years

#### Worm farm

- Service at six and 18 months after installation then every 12 months thereafter

## What are the health warning signs of my system?

### Your OWMS may need attention if:

- a rotten egg smell is present
- the ground is damp/soggy around the effluent disposal area
- the toilet, shower or drains are slow to clear

It's your responsibility to respond to problems with your wastewater system and to let Council know.

## What records should I keep?

You have a responsibility to retain maintenance records for a period of five years after the maintenance activity.

To demonstrate you have a well functioning system, records can be forwarded to [environmentalhealth@mansfield.vic.gov.au](mailto:environmentalhealth@mansfield.vic.gov.au)

## Helpful hints

### ✓ Do

- Have your system regularly maintained by professionals
- Get a service agreement in place to prompt you
- Switch to bio-degradable or natural cleaners
- Chemicals like paints, solvents, disinfectants, bleaches and pesticides can kill the helpful bacteria in your septic system. The bacteria help break down the effluent. Bicarb soda and white vinegar are good alternatives.
- Be careful what you flush, wash or spray

These items are best kept out of your septic system:

- food scraps suitable for compost
- hair and dental floss
- fats and oils
- coffee grounds
- tissues
- cat litter
- nappy sanitisers

Non-biodegradable materials that enter your OWMS can cause blockages and unnecessary wear and tear.

### ✗ Don't

#### Don't turn off treatment systems when the house is unoccupied

This can damage pumps, control panels and alarms and lead to costly repairs and failing systems.

#### Don't install garbage disposal units in kitchens

They can disrupt bacteria vital to breaking down effluent.

