

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

No. 501

DISPOSAL OF SEPTAGE FROM ON-SITE WASTEWATER SYSTEMS

This fact sheet provides information about the disposal of septage from on-site wastewater treatment systems. Septage is the material pumped out from septic tanks during desludging; contains partly decomposed scum, sludge and liquid.

The disposal of this waste must be controlled to ensure minimal impact on the environment and minimal risk to health.

BACKGROUND

Septage is considered to be night-soil under the Public Health (General Sanitation, Mosquito Prevention, Rat Exclusion and Prevention) Regulations. The disposal of night-soil is also referenced in the Public Health (Night-Soil, Garbage, Cesspits, Wells and Water) Regulations.

Regulation 17 of Public Health (General Sanitation, Mosquito Prevention, Rat Exclusion and Prevention) Regulations requires the Waste Disposal Contractor to obtain permission from Environmental Health prior to depositing night-soil.

WHAT ARE YOU REQUIRED TO DO?

Disposal of septage must be to a designated trench (i.e. not trenches intended or used for landfill), preferably within landfill sites.

Occupational Health & Safety issues are to be considered whenever handling septage, protective clothing is to be used and hands are to be washed regularly, prior to smoking, eating, etc.

Written permission is to be obtained from:

- Local Government Authority prior to disposing night-soil in a Council owned landfill
- Environmental Health – a plan must firstly be provided to Environmental Health clearly detailing the site/location of trench.

Once permission is obtained, the following setback and trench requirements must be met.

SETBACK REQUIREMENTS

The designated trench is to comply with the following setback requirements:

- 1000 metres minimum from a dam, well or bore, reservoir, public or domestic water supply
- 500 metres minimum from a stream or water course
- 250 metres minimum from a growing edible vegetable or flowering fruit tree.

Notwithstanding these setbacks, it is recognised that they may not be practicable in all situations and so should be discussed with Environmental Health.

DESIGNATED TRENCH REQUIREMENTS

The trench(s) shall:

- be of sufficient volume to contain the amount of septage requiring disposal
- be located so as to minimise access by humans and stock
- not cause a public health nuisance, mosquito breeding, etc
- be immediately covered with a minimum of 150 millimetres soil
- if in a landfill site, have a setback distance of at least 6 metres from a landfill trench or adjacent septage trenches.

PENALTY FOR OFFENCES

As per Regulation 34 of the Public Health (General Sanitation, Mosquito Prevention, Rat Exclusion and Prevention) Regulations and Regulation 22 of the Public Health (Night-Soil, Garbage, Cesspits, Wells and Water) Regulations, i.e. "not exceeding \$1000 and, where the offence is a continuing offence, to an additional penalty not exceeding \$100 for every day during which the offence continues".

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