

# sewage management



## septic tank & absorption trench



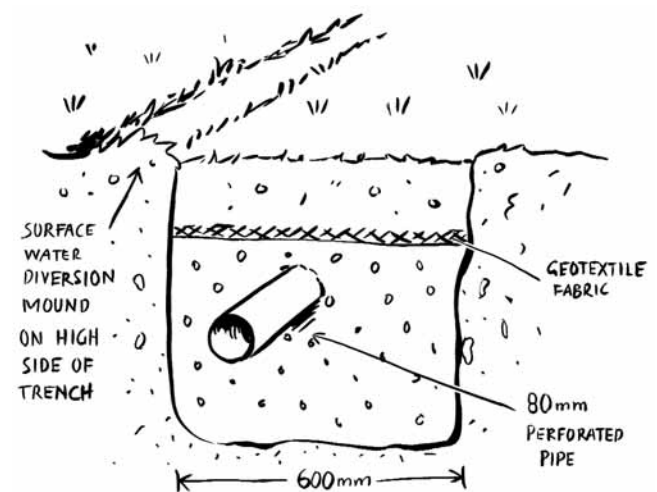
*In unsewered areas, choosing an appropriate method for the treatment and disposal of household wastewater is critical in preserving the health of the public and the environment. The traditional **Septic tank and absorption trench system** is one such way to achieve effective sewage management on residential properties.*

### ◇ what is an absorption trench?

In a conventional septic tank and absorption trench system, wastewater is gravity-fed or pumped from the septic tank/s to the absorption area. Trenches are usually constructed below ground surfaces and consist of a durable self supporting arch, gravel or sand. Typically trenches will be from 300 to 900mm deep, and both the depth and overall length will be governed by soil type and anticipated wastewater volume.

### ◇ how does an absorption trench work?

In septic tank and absorption trench systems, household wastewater first flows into a primary septic tank where solids settle to the tank bottom to form a sludge layer, and greases and fats float to the surface to form a scum layer. Clarified effluent then flows, or is pumped, to the absorption trench for treatment and disposal. The effluent is typically distributed the length of the trench via pipes, and filters through the gravel and sand to the underlying soil. This filtering process allows the removal of



pathogens, toxins and other pollutants. Nutrients within the wastewater are alternatively taken up by vegetation (normally grass) planted across the surface of the trench.

***Please note that the septic tank and absorption trench systems have the potential to contaminate groundwater and are not recommended in sensitive locations or in areas with heavy clay or shallow soils.***

### ◇ maintaining your absorption trench

Even a well designed and properly operating septic tank and absorption trench system will eventually fail, if it is not maintained. Regular maintenance is essential in prolonging the life of your absorption trench and avoiding any costly repairs.

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### ◇ maintaining your absorption trench cont...

The following tips will help in ensuring that your system continues to operate efficiently:

- Do not plant trees or shrubs on top of the septic tank or absorption trench;
- Do not park vehicles or build structures on top of the absorption trench or allow stock to graze over the area;
- Ensure stormwater is diverted away from the absorption trench;
- Ensure that your septic tank is regularly desludged;
- Maintain grass cover on the surface of the trench to allow uptake of nutrients;
- Minimise the use of detergents, bleaches and disinfectants around the home; and
- Ensure that you regularly inspect your septic system.

The following warning signs will indicate that your system is not working well:

- Soggy grass in the area above or near the absorption trench during dry periods;
- Gurgling sounds in the plumbing;
- Sluggish flow when flushing the toilet; and/or
- Backup of sewage in house plumbing.

Should you notice any of these signs, contact a licensed plumber immediately.

### ◇ approval to operate

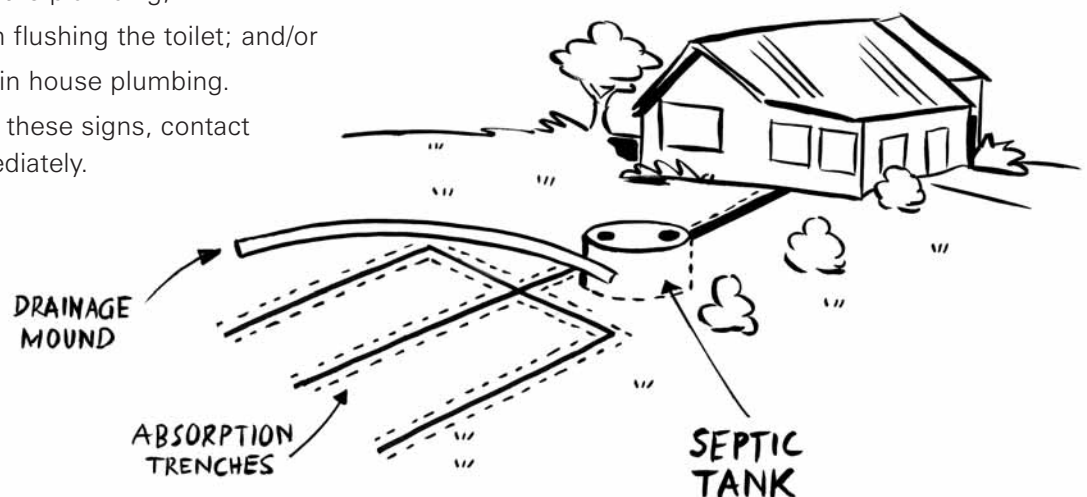
The NSW Government introduced the SepticSafe Program in 1998 to help property owners and Councils keep onsite sewage management systems working efficiently and safely. All owners of sewage management systems are now required to apply to Council for an Approval to Operate. This Approval is a means by which the Council can monitor and manage the cumulative impact of sewage pollution in local areas. The Approval also ensures that property owners are aware of their responsibility to efficiently operate and regularly maintain their system.

### ◇ further information

*Department of Local Government 'SepticSafe Program'*  
- [www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/dlg\\_home.asp](http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/dlg_home.asp)

*Local Government (Approvals) Regulation 1999*  
- [www.austlii.edu.au](http://www.austlii.edu.au)

*Approval to Operate Application Form*  
- [www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au](http://www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au)



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#### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

General information on septic tank and absorption trench systems can be obtained from the Environmental Health & Protection Team on **9847 6829**.