



Fact Sheet No 5.

## On-Site Sewage Management

### A Guide for Property Owners

Most people will now be aware of Legislation in NSW that requires owners of on-site sewage management systems to apply for an approval to operate from their local Council. The Legislation also requires that Councils implement a management program for the approval and monitoring of new, altered and existing systems. Port Stephens Council has developed an On-site Sewage Management Strategy with the objectives of improving the performance standards of all wastewater systems in the area and reducing impacts on public health and the environment caused by system failure. A brief outline of this strategy and details of the inspection process are outlined in this information sheet.

#### Approval to Operate an On-site Sewage Management System

- All Approvals contain conditions that outline the best management practices for system types nominated on individual applications. Approvals are renewed annually or when the property changes ownership.
- Owners are advised to operate their systems in accordance with the conditions attached to their approval to operate.
- It is important that your approval is kept up to date. Failure to renew your approval annually may impose an on-the-spot fine of \$330.00.
- Owners who have not yet made an application for an "Approval to Operate" are advised to contact Council to obtain an application form.
- The fee associated with the "Approval to Operate" is included onto the annual land rates notice.

**Operation of On-site Systems WITHOUT an Approval in NSW is an offence with penalties of up to \$2,200 in the Local Court**

#### System Inspections

Council officers have been carrying out inspections of on-site sewage management systems since March 2000. After the each inspection, the system will be classified as high, medium or low risk and further inspections will be carried out at a frequency based on this risk assessment.

#### **HIGH RISK – 2 years**

#### **MEDIUM RISK – 2-3 years**

#### **LOW RISK – 5 or more years**

- Aerated systems currently being serviced by approved service agents will be classified as either Medium or Low Risk once Council determines that individual systems meet the performance standards outlined in the Legislation and the On-site Sewage Management Strategy.
- The inspection process aims at identifying problems with the operation of septic systems. It will also be an ideal time for owners to receive advice on the best operation and management practices to improve the performance and life expectancy of their individual systems.
- Prior to an inspection taking place residents will be informed, in writing, of the proposed inspection date. If for some reason the date specified is not suitable, or you wish to be present at the inspection, the Council officer will need to be notified by phone to make alternative arrangements. **If residents are not at home when an inspector calls, the inspection will still be performed.** After the inspection, all owners will be forwarded an audit report on the assessment of their system. The correspondence will also contain any advice relating to the operation or maintenance of individual systems and may require action by the owners if the system is found to be failing.

### Approval & Inspection Fees

*This section contains an outline of the fees and charges. This schedule has been designed to provide Council and users of on-site sewage systems with a cost-effective, user pays monitoring program that is revenue neutral to Council and provides an efficient mechanism to ensure the long term environmental and public health objectives of the new Legislation.*

### Table of Fees & Charges

Application for "Approval to Operate" (initial)	\$30.00	Payable on initial application
Site & System Inspection	NIL	All routine inspections do not incur a fee
Pre-Purchase Inspection	\$40.00	Payable by purchaser prior to inspection performed
Follow up Inspections	\$40.00	Add to first inspection if work and follow up inspection required (at Council's discretion)
Annual Renewal of Approval	\$55.00	Payable by all owners annually
Extraordinary Costs	Cost Recovery	Eg. Water sampling and Analysis (if required)

*These fees will be reviewed annually to ensure costs to the property owner are kept at a minimum*

### Check List

- ✓ If you own or live on a property that has a septic system, ensure it has an "Approval to Operate". If not, contact Council immediately.
- ✓ If you recently purchased a property that has a septic system, your details will automatically be updated on Council's wastewater database and a copy of the approval/conditions will be forwarded to you.
- ✓ Read the approval and ensure the system is operated in accordance with the attached conditions.
- ✓ For further advice on Council's On-site Sewage Management Program, contact Council's Wastewater Management Officers on 4980 0394 / 49800106.

### Program Benefits

- ❖ A comprehensive inspection and education program should reduce the environmental and public health impacts caused by septic system failure.
- ❖ Inspections will also reduce system failure and expensive disposal field replacement costs.
- ❖ The majority of septic systems in the Port Stephens area should be either medium or low risk systems.
- ❖ The cost of running different types of septic systems varies greatly. However, maintenance costs for most systems currently in use in the Port Stephens area would compare favorably with the annual cost of around \$450 for a property connected to the sewer mains.
- ❖ The new fees also compare favorably with those proposed by other Councils in NSW and with the environmental levy of \$40 currently in place for all Hunter Water Corporation customers.