

You have a possible failure of your sewage system if any of the following occur:

- Water drains slowly from sink, shower, bath or washing machine.
- You can smell sewage.
- The water backs up in sinks and/or shower.
- The effluent disposal area gets smelly and waterlogged.
- You can see collapsed or sunken trenches or broken pipes.

Some of the reasons for system failure includes:

- Shock loading - high volumes of water from baths, spas, multiple washing loads.
- Chemical use, harsh cleaning products.
- Systems are old and need replacing.
- Lack of maintenance e.g. failing to pump septic tanks every 3-5 years.
- Overgrown vegetation entering on-site systems and causing blockages.
- Driving vehicles over, or allowing cattle to walk over trenches or beds.
- Undersized septic tanks or disposal areas.

Did you know ?

On-site sewage management systems have three main components:

- 1) **The Inlet** — all the water waste from inside the home usually connects to the septic tank ...not just toilet waste, kitchen, shower and laundry are also connected to the septic tank and enter the through an inlet pipe.
- 2) **The Treatment System** — where all the hard work takes place... The most common treatment system is a **Septic tank**; other types of treatment systems include **Composting chambers, Aerated treatment systems or Reed beds.**

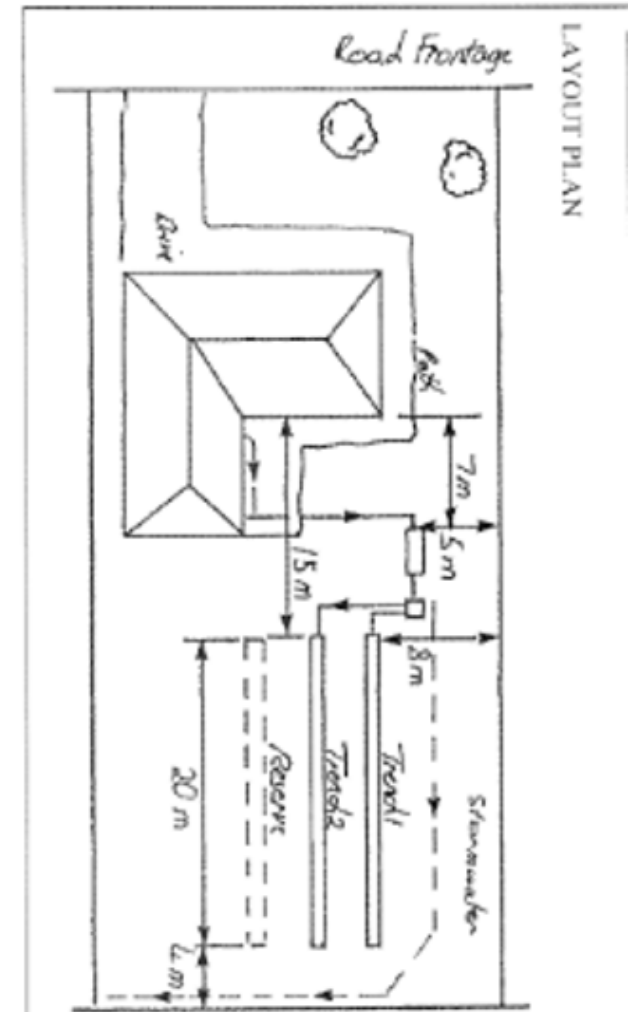
This is where treatment of the sewage begins, **bacterial bugs** begin to breakdown some of the waste and the **solids** are **separated** from the liquids, it is much like a big stomach digesting waste. A healthy tank has a crust on top, liquid effluent in the middle and sludge on the bottom.

- 3) **The Outlet (Land Application Area)** — this is where the sewage waste leaves **the treatment system** or septic tank. At this stage the solids should have settled to the bottom of the tank (**sludge**) which stays behind until a pump out service and the liquid (**effluent**) escapes out of the outlet and through a pipe into a trench system within the land application area.

Much like a stomach the treatment system can become ill if the balance in the treatment system is disturbed from the wrong things going down the sink or toilet, cleaning chemicals causing the good bugs to die off, causing **bad odours**. Sanitary products and facial wipes can also cause blockages and **sewage leaks**, not pleasant or safe to your health.



**Bellingren Shire Council -
Guide to On-Site Sewage
Management Systems (OSMS)**



Example of septic tank & land application trench diagram

The OSMS Approval Program

What is an On-Site Sewage Management System?

On-site Sewage Management Systems (OSMS) are the treatment systems that collect wastewater from the home for the treatment and discharge into a septic system located within the property of unsewered areas of the shire.

What is an Approval to Operate?

From 1 July 1998 Council approval is required for the operation of an on-site sewage management system. This was as a result of many systems found to be not performing adequately, and as a result risks to environmental and public health occurred.

What is a section 68 application?

Under the Local Government Act section 68, Council approval is required prior to works being undertaken for the installation or alteration of an on-site sewage management system (apart from maintenance and minor repairs).

The section 68 application will also need to be accompanied by a waste water report, from a suitably qualified waste water consultant. See Council's web page www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au for further information.

Council Responsibilities

It is mandatory as part of State Legislation to have all OSMS approved. Local Councils have the responsibility to maintain a register of on-site sewage systems in Bellingen Shire and for the issuing of approvals to operate.

Council also has the responsibility for working with home owners to ensure that OSMS systems are functioning correctly and that the performance of systems do not cause negative impacts on the environment or public health.

Council has a priority inspection program for managing on-site sewage management systems. An inspection will be conducted of all on-site systems; the frequency of inspections is based on the performance of the individual system as well as the proximity of the system to environmentally sensitive areas such as waterways. A letter will be sent notifying residents prior to an inspection.

If systems are found to be not performing satisfactorily, Section 124 of the Local Government Act 1993 provides powers to Council to issue orders e.g. to comply with an approval to operate or cease using an OSMS. Failure to get approval to operate or to comply with the conditions of approval are offenses that carry fines.

Home Owner Responsibilities

Ensure that your system is performing correctly by conducting periodic visual inspections of the treatment tank and land application areas.

Ensure there is no strong odour or liquid escaping the system or ponding on the land application area. **Note:** *It is not advised to open the septic tank without correct protective equipment or knowledge of the system.*

Owner Requirements

Do learn the location and layout of your septic system and land application area. A plumber can assist with locating the system.

Do ensure that leaks or blockages are attended to by a qualified plumber and Council is notified of the necessary works undertaken.

Do use soapy water to clean toilets and other fixtures. Restrict the use of disinfectants & bleaches as they will kill the good bacteria in the septic tank.

Do keep the septic system clear of intrusive vegetation and fence off the disposal area to keep stock and vehicles off the tank and disposal area.

Do minimise the amount of oil and fat entering the system from your kitchen sink.

Do have the septic tank inspected and pumped out every 3 years for greater than 2 users, 5 years for 1-2 users.

Bellingen Shire Council

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For more information visit our website.

<https://www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au/environment-waste/environmental-health>