
The Environmental Protection Agency has published the third National Inspection Plan for the period 2018 to 2021: Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems Draft for Consultation http://www.epa.ie/pubs/consultation/

The Water Services (Amendment) Act 2012 requires the EPA to prepare a national inspection plan for domestic waste water treatment systems (commonly known as septic tanks).

Plan overview

The aim of the plan is to protect human health and water quality from the risks posed by domestic waste water treatment systems. There are two strands to the plan:

(1) Inspection System - Local authority inspectors are required to undertake the inspection of a minimum of 1,000 domestic waste water treatment systems each year across the country. A local authority inspector issues an advisory notice to the home owner if their domestic waste water system fails the inspection. The home owner must then undertake the required remedial work within the time specified on the advisory notice.

(2) Engagement Activities - Local authorities are responsible for providing information and advice to home owners on how they can protect their health and that of their family, neighbours and environment from the risks posed by domestic waste water treatment systems.

Updated risk based methodology

The risk based methodology used in previous national inspection plans has been updated by the EPA to take account of the additional information gathered during the preparation of the River Basin Management Plan 2018 to 2021.

As part of the River Basin Management Plan at risk water bodies have been identified. These are rivers, lakes, groundwater, coastal and estuarine waters which have been identified as being at risk of not meeting the requirements of the Water Framework Directive to meet at least good status.

Areas for action have been identified where mitigation and protection measures will be focused, between 2018 and 2021, to ensure the water quality objectives of the River Basin Management Plan can be achieved.
The new methodology will focus a higher number of inspections in at risk water bodies, within areas for action, where domestic waste water treatment systems are known to be a significant pressure. The undertaking of remedial works in these targeted areas provides the greatest potential for water quality improvements from the inspection process.

Ten risk zones have been developed by the EPA to distribute the minimum 1,000 inspections nationally. Each local authority will be required to undertake a specified number of inspections per risk zone. The inspections have been distributed across the ten risk zones based on a weighting system. This allows the greatest number of inspections to be focused on the higher risk zones.

Any shortfall in the number of inspections completed at the end of the 2015 to 2017 reporting period will be carried over and added to the number of inspections to be undertaken by local authorities in 2018.

The plan recommends that additional inspections are carried out by local authorities if there is evidence at a local level that domestic waste water treatment systems are causing an issue in a catchment.

**Engagement and supervision**

Local authorities are responsible for on-going engagement with the public and communication at a local level. It is the EPA’s responsibility to oversee the implementation of the engagement campaign by the local authorities.

Previous reports on implementation of the national inspection plans show that approximately 50% of domestic waste water treatment systems fail inspection. Sites generally fail inspection due to operation and maintenance issues.

Home owners need to be made aware that proper operation and maintenance of domestic waste water treatment systems can lessen the risks posed to their private drinking water supplies and water bodies.

Interested parties are being invited to provide suggestions during the public consultation period on ways to engage with householders to increase awareness around issues relating to the operation and maintenance of domestic waste water treatment systems.

**Consultation**

You are invited to submit your comments on the consultation document to nipconsultation@epa.ie no later than 5pm on the 26th January 2018.