

# Domestic Waste Water Treatment System (DWWTS) Inspections 2022

## KEY FINDINGS

- 1,143 DWWTS inspections were completed by local authorities in 2022. Inspections by Clare, Waterford and Offaly Councils were well below their 2022 requirements.
- Half of DWWTS failed inspection in 2022 and 20% were a risk to human health and the environment. This points to a need for householders to ensure their DWWTS are properly built and maintained.
- 78% of systems that failed during 2013–2022 are fixed. However, enforcement by local authorities is inconsistent with the lowest rates of DWWTS failures fixed in Roscommon, Waterford, Leitrim and Tipperary.

## INTRODUCTION

Domestic waste water treatment systems (DWWTS) are used by householders to treat sewage. There are nearly half a million systems in Ireland, mostly septic tanks.

Risk to human health is a key concern from faulty septic tanks. Faulty septic tanks can contaminate household drinking water wells with harmful bacteria and viruses if not built and operated properly. People may be exposed to sewage if it surfaces in gardens or runs off into ditches/streams.

Excessive releases of nitrogen and phosphorus can cause pollution in receiving waters. Domestic waste water is identified as a significant pressure on water quality on 9% (148/1,648) of our at-risk water bodies.

The National Inspection Plan identifies the number of inspections to be completed by local authorities. It is now running 10 years with over 10,000 inspections completed by local authorities. The National Inspection Plan 2022-2026 focuses the inspections near rivers known to be at risk from DWWTS and where DWWTS are co-located with household wells.

Inspections under the National Inspection Plan are separate to other DWWTS work by local authorities in relation to grant applications, catchment assessments, complaints, and planning/building control.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

Local authorities completed 1,143 inspections under the National Inspection Plan in 2022 (Table 1). Clare, Waterford, Offaly, Monaghan and Galway City Council did not complete their 2022 allocation and are required to make this up in 2023.

49% (560/1,143) of systems inspected failed. Since 2013, the failure rate has varied from 44% to 57%.

20% (230/1,143) of systems inspected were a risk to human health or the environment.

Reasons for failures were in two categories (Figure 1):

- Operational (de-sludging and maintenance).
- Structural defects (illegal discharges to ditches/streams, leaks, ponding and rainwater ingress).

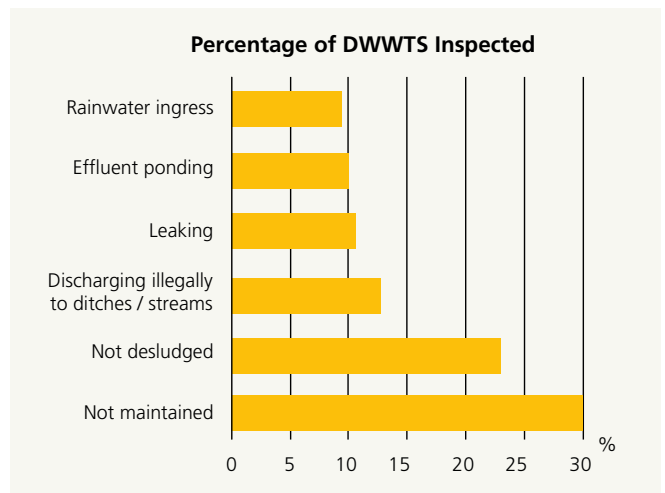


FIGURE 1: Reasons for DWWTS failures 2022 (individual DWWTS can fail for multiple reasons)

## LOCAL AUTHORITY ENFORCEMENT

When DWWTS fail inspection, local authorities issue advisory notices requiring householders to fix them.

78% (3,983/5,080) of systems that failed during 2013-2022 were fixed by the end of 2022 (Table 1). This is an improvement from 75% in 2021. However, enforcement of advisory notices by local authorities is inconsistent with the lowest rates of DWWTS failures fixed in Roscommon, Waterford, Leitrim and Tipperary.

Local authorities have taken 47 legal actions for failure to fix DWWTS since 2013, with 11 taken in 2022. 90% (43/47) of these legal actions were taken by Wexford, Kerry and Mayo County Councils.

The number of DWWTS failures open more than two years (Figure 2) is of particular concern. This has accumulated to 550 at the end of 2022 (Figure 2). Half of these involve sewage surfacing in gardens and/or discharging illegally to ditches/streams.

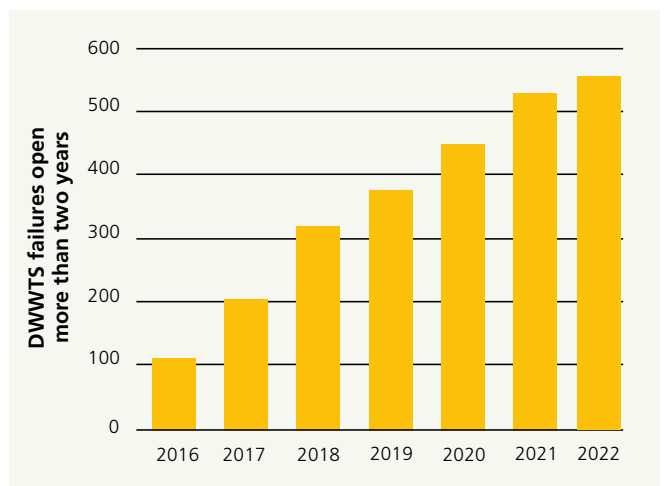


FIGURE 2: DWWTS failures open more than two years at the end of each year 2016 to 2022

Local authorities need to increase enforcement, including prosecution where warranted, to resolve faulty DWWTS so that the environment and public health is protected.

The EPA is progressing a number of enforcement actions with local authorities that are not meeting the requirements of the National Inspection Plan, including:

- Auditing local authority DWWTS inspection and enforcement systems.
- Instructing local authorities to complete inspection shortfalls and enforce advisory notices.
- Providing support to local authorities through workshops sharing best practice on DWWTS engagement and enforcement.

## WHAT CAN HOUSEHOLDERS DO?

The failures detected in many systems represent a risk to people's health and the environment.

Householders should ensure their DWWTS are properly built and maintained, and their wells are tested to protect the health of their family. You can get guidance on the EPA website if you are concerned about your [DWWTS](#) or [well](#).

[DWWTS grants](#) up to €5,000 are available to fix DWWTS in certain circumstances. Details of the eligibility criteria are available on the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage website and from the local authorities who administer the grants. [Private well grants](#) may also be available for improvement works to private water supplies.

The uptake of DWWTS grants has increased by almost one-third since 2021, with over 200 grants totalling nearly €1 million awarded in 2022.

**TABLE 1:** Inspection findings by local authority area (ranked by percent of systems fixed)

WATER SERVICE AUTHORITY	Inspections required 2022*	Inspections done 2022	Failure rate 2022	Systems failing 2013-2022	Percent fixed at end 2022
Cork City	8	8	0%	2	100%
Fingal	11	11	9%	36	100%
Louth	11	11	18%	47	100%
Wicklow	44	46	35%	125	94%
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	1	4	50%	17	94%
Carlow	15	16	38%	35	91%
Cork County	113	113	52%	448	90%
Longford	4	8	63%	54	89%
Cavan	28	30	30%	136	87%
Kerry	50	65	46%	279	86%
Wexford	106	137	64%	733	86%
Limerick	52	67	36%	239	85%
Sligo	6	12	25%	135	84%
Clare	93	53	32%	180	83%
Monaghan	33	30	37%	100	83%
Donegal	90	100	44%	317	83%
Westmeath	7	7	14%	36	81%
Galway City	1	0	n/a	5	80%
Meath	53	72	61%	343	80%
Kildare	21	38	63%	131	77%
Offaly	21	6	17%	58	74%
Laois	9	9	56%	88	74%
South Dublin	4	9	44%	29	72%
Mayo	45	74	64%	469	70%
Kilkenny	55	55	64%	166	63%
Galway County	88	93	46%	325	63%
Tipperary	34	38	47%	149	59%
Leitrim	8	14	71%	150	57%
Waterford	20	4	75%	39	56%
Roscommon	13	13	69%	209	53%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1044</b>	<b>1143</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>5080</b>	<b>78%</b>

\* Includes inspections carried forward from 2021

### TABLE KEY

	Local authorities who did not complete their inspection allocation in 2022		High rate of DWWTS failures fixed		Moderate rate of DWWTS failures fixed		Low rate of DWWTS failures fixed
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