

Domestic Waste Water Treatment System Inspections 2024

KEY FINDINGS

- 1,390 Domestic Waste Water Treatment System (DWWTS) inspections were completed by local authorities in 2024. 56% of DWWTS failed inspection, with a significant number identified as a risk to human health and the environment.
- 82% of DWWTS that failed during 2013–2024 were fixed by the end of 2024 which is continued improvement from 75% at the end of 2021.
- The number of advisory notices open more than two years decreased from 576 at the end of 2023 to 523 at the end of 2024.

INTRODUCTION

DWWTS are used by householders to treat waste water. There are nearly half a million DWWTS in Ireland, mostly septic tanks.

Faulty DWWTS pose a risk to human health and the environment.

- **Risk to human health** This is a key concern. Faulty DWWTS can contaminate household drinking water wells with harmful bacteria and viruses. People may be exposed to waste water if it surfaces in gardens or runs off into ditches and streams.
- **Risk to the environment** Excessive releases of nitrogen and phosphorus from faulty DWWTS can cause pollution in receiving waters. Domestic waste water is identified as a significant pressure on water quality in 148 (9%) of at-risk water bodies in Ireland.

The National Inspection Plan (NIP) requires local authorities to complete a minimum of 1,200 inspections annually. It is now running 12 years with nearly 13,000 inspections completed. The inspections are targeted at areas with greatest risk from pollution, with the majority near rivers known to be at risk from DWWTS and in areas where DWWTS are co-located with household drinking water wells.

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

INSPECTIONS

Local authorities completed 1,390 inspections under the NIP in 2024 (Table 1). Limerick, Donegal, Wexford and Leitrim local authorities did not complete their full 2024 allocations and are required to make these up in 2025. The EPA may issue a legal direction to local authorities in the event inspection shortfalls are not addressed.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

56% (773/1,390) of DWWTS inspected in 2024 failed, with a significant number identified as a risk to human health and the environment. The annual failure rate has varied between 44% and 57% since the NIP started in 2013. 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).

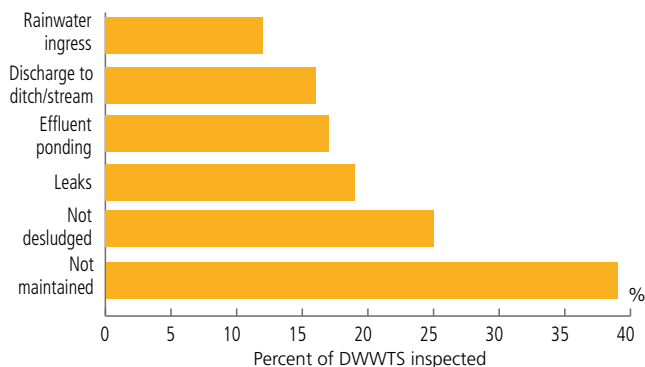


FIGURE 1: Reasons for DWWTS failures 2024 (individual DWWTS can fail for multiple reasons).

LOCAL AUTHORITY ENFORCEMENT

Local authorities issue advisory notices requiring householders to fix DWWTS that fail inspection. Failure to resolve advisory notices has been highlighted for a number of years in these reports.

82% (5,217/6,354) of DWWTS that failed during 2013–2024 were fixed by the end of 2024 (Table 1). This represents a continued improvement from 75% at the end of 2021. In addition, the number of advisory notices open more than two years has decreased for the first time from 576 at the end of 2023 to 523 at the end of 2024 (Figure 2). This has been aided by the increase in grants for DWWTS remediation from €5,000 to €12,000 from the start of 2024.

While the improvement in closure of advisory notices in 2024 is welcome, there are significant differences across local authorities (Table 1) and enforcement remains inconsistent. The number of legal cases since inspections commenced in 2013 increased from 62 at the end of 2023 to 66 at the end 2024, however, 95% of those cases were taken by four local authorities, Wexford, Kerry, Mayo and Limerick. 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 monitoring progress with particular focus on local authorities with the most advisory notices open greater than two years.

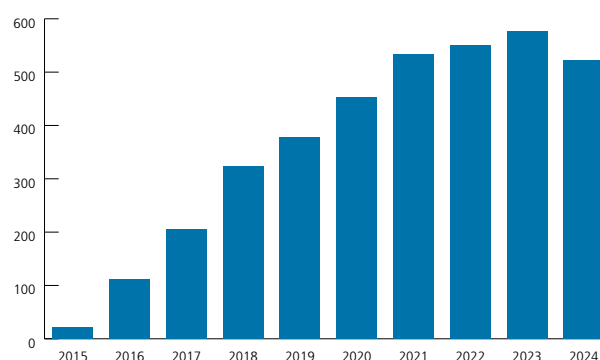


FIGURE 2: DWWTS failures open more than two years at the end of each year 2016 to 2024.

INCREASED GRANT SUPPORT IN 2024

The DWWTs grant schemes were changed at the start of 2024 to increase the amount from €5,000 to €12,000 and remove the requirement to have registered the DWWTs in 2013. Local authorities issued 265 grants, totalling nearly €2.5 million, in 2024. The EPA required local authorities to engage with all householders with open advisory notices in relation to the changes to the grants in 2024 and to follow through on the enforcement of advisory notices. This work has driven the improvement in the closure of advisory notices particularly the closure of older cases.

WHAT CAN HOUSEHOLDERS DO?

The failures detected in many DWWTs represent a risk to people's health and the environment. Householders should ensure their DWWTs are properly built and maintained, and their drinking water 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 [drinking water well](#). Details of [DWWTs grants](#) and [household drinking water well grants](#) are available on the DHLGH website and from the local authorities who administer the grants.

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

WATER SERVICE AUTHORITY	Inspections required 2024*	Inspections done 2024	Failure rate 2024	Systems failing 2013-2024	Percent fixed at end 2024
Fingal	13	13	0%	37	100%
Louth	12	12	33%	54	98%
Wicklow	55	58	36%	162	98%
Sligo	7	13	54%	150	95%
South Dublin	4	4	75%	34	94%
Longford	4	10	30%	63	94%
Carlow	18	20	45%	47	94%
Offaly	8	27	70%	85	93%
Cavan	33	33	52%	169	90%
Wexford	137	120	70%	869	87%
Meath	63	82	54%	425	86%
Kerry	59	65	40%	333	86%
Monaghan	41	49	65%	159	84%
Cork County	136	136	63%	587	84%
Kildare	25	42	83%	184	83%
Donegal	107	77	51%	399	82%
Tipperary	40	42	31%	182	81%
Limerick	111	50	54%	266	81%
Mayo	53	59	59%	541	81%
Clare	95	95	42%	277	81%
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	2	7	100%	30	77%
Leitrim	16	4	75%	156	76%
Galway County	183	183	45%	411	74%
Galway City	1	2	50%	7	71%
Waterford	24	24	50%	65	71%
Laois	10	65	97%	156	67%
Kilkenny	51	61	56%	221	67%
Westmeath	12	12	92%	49	63%
Roscommon	13	13	85%	228	60%
Cork City	10	12	33%	8	50%**
TOTAL	1,343	1,390	56%	6,354	82%

* Includes inspection shortfalls carried forward from 2023. ** Cork City completed their inspections late in 2024. There are no open advisory notices pre-2024.

TABLE KEY

	Local authorities who did not complete their inspection allocation in 2024		High rate of DWWTs failures fixed		Moderate rate of DWWTs failures fixed		Low rate of DWWTs failures fixed
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