

Domestic Waste Water Treatment System Inspections 2025

KEY FINDINGS

- 1,466 Domestic Waste Water Treatment System (DWWTS) inspections were completed by local authorities in 2025. 59% of DWWTS failed inspection, with a significant number identified as a risk to human health and the environment.
- 84% of DWWTS that failed during 2013–2025 were fixed by the end of 2025.
- The number of advisory notices open more than two years decreased from 523 at the end of 2024 to 442 at the end of 2025.

INTRODUCTION

DWWTS are used by homeowners 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.** Faulty DWWTS can contaminate 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 13 years with approximately 14,500 inspections completed. Inspections are targeted at areas where DWWTS are identified as a pollution risk, 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 1,466 inspections under the NIP in 2025 (Table 1). Fingal, Donegal and Wexford local authorities did not complete their full 2025 allocations and are required to complete these inspections in 2026 in addition to their 2026 assigned inspections. The EPA has issued legal directions to local authorities in the past where inspection shortfalls persisted and this option remains open to the EPA if current shortfalls are not addressed.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

59% (863/1,466) of DWWTS inspected in 2025 failed, with a significant number of failures identified as a risk to human health and the environment. A high failure rate is consistent with preceding years which shows that issues persist with DWWTS and that they are not being appropriately maintained by homeowners.

Reasons for failure include operational issues such as inadequate desludging and maintenance, as well as structural defects including illegal discharges to ditches or streams, leaks, ponding, (Figure 1) and rainwater ingress.



FIGURE 1: Ponding caused by a failed septic tank.

LOCAL AUTHORITY ENFORCEMENT

Local authorities issue advisory notices requiring homeowners to fix DWWTS that fail inspection. Failure to resolve advisory notices in a timely manner has been highlighted for several years in these reports.

By the end of 2025, 84% (6,027/7,212) of all DWWTS that failed inspection from 2013–2025 had been fixed. This is an increase from 70% at the end of 2018 and represents continued improvement year on year in the number of DWWTS fixed after failing inspection.

The number of advisory notices open more than two years has decreased for the second time from 523 at the end of 2024 to 442 at the end of 2025 (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, greater enforcement by proactive local authorities and increased regulatory oversight of local authorities by the EPA. The EPA, through its audits and report assessment activities, continues to monitor local authorities progress in closing advisory notices, with particular focus on local authorities with advisory notices that remain open for greater than two years.

While the improvement in closure of advisory notices in 2025 is welcome, there are significant differences in how enforcement is escalated by local authorities (Table 1). Nine local authorities had resolved less than 80% of advisory notices issued by them by the end of 2025. The number of legal cases since inspections commenced in 2013 increased from 66 at the end of 2024 to 88 at the end 2025, however, 90% 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.

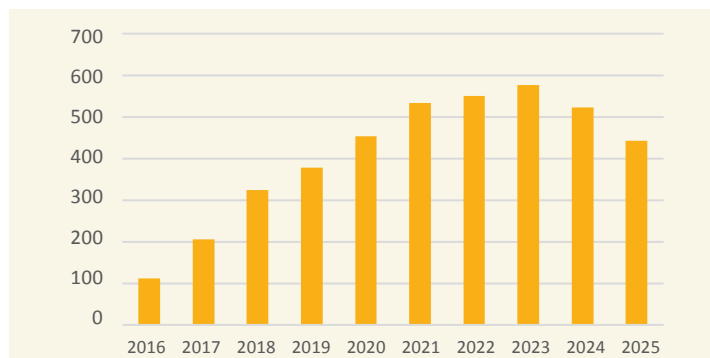


FIGURE 2: DWWTS failures open more than two years at the end of each year.

WHAT CAN HOMEOWNERS DO?

The failures detected in many DWWTS represent a risk to people's health, including the homeowner and their family, and the environment. Homeowners 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 grant](#) 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 2025*	Inspections completed 2025	Failure rate 2025	Systems failing 2013-2025	% Fixed at end 2025
Carlow	18	22	27%	53	100%
Wicklow	55	57	39%	184	98%
Fingal	13	1	100%	38	97%
Louth	12	13	38%	60	97%
South Dublin	4	4	25%	35	94%
Sligo	7	7	57%	154	94%
Longford	4	10	40%	67	94%
Offaly	8	47	96%	128	93%
Kildare	25	46	41%	203	89%
Meath	63	65	75%	474	89%
Monaghan	41	50	52%	185	89%
Wexford	147	125	64%	949	88%
Cavan	33	34	56%	188	88%
Galway	105	106	53%	466	86%
Kerry	59	75	61%	378	85%
Mayo	53	71	66%	588	84%
Galway City	1	5	100%	12	83%
Cork	136	136	56%	663	82%
Dun Laoghaire - Rathdown	2	25	48%	42	81%
Clare	95	97	40%	316	80%
Leitrim	22	23	61%	170	80%
Tipperary	40	44	52%	205	78%
Donegal	137	126	67%	483	77%
Waterford City	24	24	75%	83	77%
Laois	10	22	95%	177	76%
Roscommon	13	13	85%	239	75%
Limerick City	125	126	60%	341	73%
Kilkenny	51	61	46%	249	69%
Westmeath	7	20	85%	65	57%
Cork City	10	11	82%	17	29%
Total	1320	1466	59%	7212	84%

* Includes minimum number of inspections allocated in the NIP 2022-2026 and inspection shortfalls carried forward from 2024.

Local authorities who did not complete their inspection allocation in 2025.

High rate of DWWTS failures fixed.

Moderate rate of DWWTS failures fixed.

Low rate of DWWTS failures fixed.