

Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems (DWWTS) Inspections and Enforcement 2019



KEY FINDINGS

- 51% of systems failed and 26% were a risk to human health or the environment.
- 73% of systems that failed have been fixed. This is an area that requires increased engagement and enforcement by Local Authorities.

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government has expanded the DWWTS grant scheme.

INTRODUCTION

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

DWWTS can contaminate household wells with harmful bacteria and viruses if not built and operated properly. Excessive releases of nitrogen and phosphorus can pollute rivers, lakes and coastal waters.

The National Inspection Plan is running since mid-2013. Local authorities inspect over 1,000 systems each year. This report presents the 2019 results.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

Local authorities completed 1,160 inspections in line with the National Inspection Plan in 2019.

51% of the systems inspected failed (589). 44-57% of systems inspected failed each year for the last seven years.

26% of systems inspected in 2019 were a risk to human health or the environment (298).

Failures were in two categories (Figure 1):

- De-sludging and maintenance failures;
- Structural defects causing illegal discharges to ditches/streams, leaks, ponding and rainwater ingress.

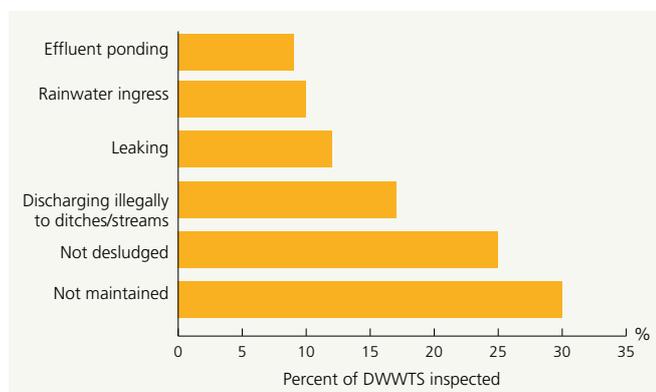


FIGURE 1: Reasons for DWWTS failures 2019 (individual DWWTS can fail for multiple reasons)

LOCAL AUTHORITY ENFORCEMENT

Local authorities issue advisory notices requiring systems that fail inspection to be fixed.

73% of systems that failed during 2013–2019 have been fixed (2,548) (Table 1 and Figure 2). This rate has improved since last year.

- 80% or more of failures have been fixed in 14 local authority areas;
- Older unresolved failures from 2013-2017 reduced from 474 to 338 in 2019;
- Four local authorities have taken 18 legal actions for failure to fix DWWTS since the National Inspection Plan commenced.

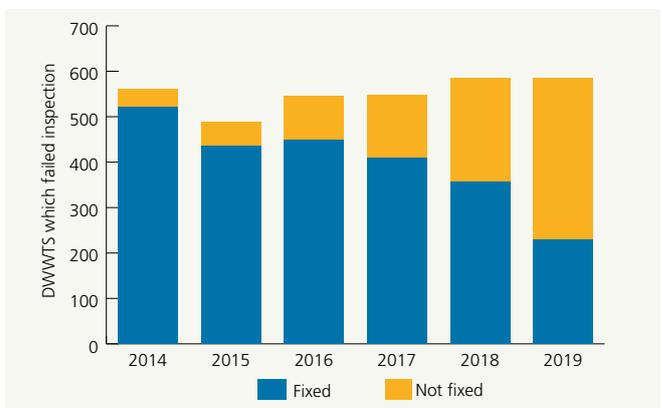


FIGURE 2: Status of DWWTS which failed 2014-2019 (end of April 2020)

While there has been progress, the failure to resolve older cases remains a concern and must be addressed as priority. The EPA audited several local authorities in 2019 and held a workshop for local authorities to increase the application of the DWWTS enforcement model. Local authorities must increase enforcement to ensure DWWTS are fixed.

CASE STUDY: WEXFORD

Wexford County Council complete the most DWWTS inspections nationally, at approximately 150 each year. They apply the DWWTS enforcement model consistently. 81% of DWWTS that failed in Wexford are fixed. All DWWTS failures from 2013-2015 and nearly all from 2016-2017 are fixed, and Wexford are progressing resolution of remaining failures from 2018-2019.

The River Basin Management Plan 2018 – 2021 sets out the actions Ireland is taking to protect and improve rivers, lakes and coastal areas. Specialist local authority teams are carrying out scientific assessments in priority areas and identifying DWWTS that may be a risk to water

quality. These assessments are in addition to the 1,000 inspections under the National Inspection Plan.

WHAT CAN HOUSEHOLDERS DO?

The failure rate shows that there are many systems that are a risk to people's health and the environment. This is especially concerning if DWWTS are near household wells or if effluent is ponding in the garden or being discharged to ditches/streams.

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](#).

NEW GRANT SCHEMES IN 2020

Grants of up to €5,000 are available to fix DWWTS:

- that fail under the National Inspection Plan;
- in High Status Objective Catchment Areas (areas where the goal is to have the highest water quality);
- where identified by local authorities in Priority Areas for Action (areas where work is being focussed to improve or protect water quality);

and for improvements to household wells.

Details of the eligibility criteria and level of grant are available on the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government website and from your local authority who administers the grants.

[DWWTS grants](#)

[Household well grants](#)

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

	Inspections required 2019	Inspections done 2019	Failure rate 2019	Systems failing 2013-2019	Percent fixed 2013-2019 (as of 30/04/20)
Carlow	15	16	19%	22	100%
Louth	8	8	0%	43	100%
Longford	9	15	73%	38	100%
Wicklow	31	37	41%	71	97%
South Dublin	2	11	55%	22	95%
Fingal	6	8	25%	29	93%
Cork County	60	60	52%	320	93%
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown	1	1	100%	13	85%
Monaghan	26	28	46%	70	84%
Clare	39	41	59%	133	84%
Donegal	118	120	18%	214	84%
Kerry	52	52	65%	207	82%
Wexford	65	156	70%	495	81%
Cavan	32	33	42%	109	80%
Laois	24	24	29%	70	79%
Kilkenny	27	36	67%	106	78%
Sligo	28	32	63%	109	73%
Limerick	33	34	50%	178	70%
Westmeath	20	19	16%	27	67%
Meath	63	69	57%	182	66%
Kildare	34	46	41%	63	65%
Tipperary	41	46	54%	111	60%
Mayo	70	67	85%	300	60%
Waterford	20	20	15%	28	54%
Galway County	101	101	39%	206	50%
Roscommon	35	36	72%	145	44%
Leitrim	23	26	62%	104	43%
Offaly	17	18	56%	50	30%
Galway City	0	-	-	5	20%
Total	1,000	1,160	51%	3,470	73%

TABLE KEY

High rate of DWWTS failures fixed

Moderate rate of DWWTS failures fixed

Low rate of DWWTS failures fixed