



Remediation and replacement of Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems (DWWTS)

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Why remediate or replace a Domestic Waste Water Treatment System?

Domestic waste water treatment systems (DWWTS) are used by rural householders to treat sewage. There are nearly half a million systems in Ireland, mostly septic tanks. Built and operated properly, they provide a safe way to treat sewage for householders not connected to sewage mains. Not built and operated properly, they can contaminate household wells with harmful bacteria and viruses. Excessive releases of nitrogen and phosphorus can pollute rivers, lakes and coastal waters.

National inspections of DWWTS show that typically half fail inspection with a quarter having problems that constitute a risk to human health or the environment. Many issues can be addressed through simple maintenance and de-sludging. However, in other cases DWWTS have serious structural problems that require remediation or replacement.

DWWTS requiring remediation or replacement may be identified by Local Authorities through inspections carried out under the National Inspection Plan, River Basin Management Plan or in investigating complaints (see below). In all these instances, the homeowner will be made aware of the issues by the Local Authority. However, many homeowners will be aware of issues and want to deal with them on their own initiative to ensure they protect the health of their family, the environment and comply with legal requirements.

Who to contact

City and County Councils are the main point of contact for householders in relation to DWWTS. They are referred to as Local Authorities in this document and you may also see them referred to as Water Service Authorities or Housing Authorities in different documents.

They are responsible for:

- **Registration** of DWWTS - done centrally through www.protectourwater.ie
- **Grants** - processing applications and award of grants
- **Inspections** - under the National Inspection Plan
- **Catchment assessments** - under the River Basin Management Plans - undertaken regionally by the Local Authority Waters Programme Office.
- **Complaints** – investigation of complaints

Local Authority DWWTS inspections under the National Inspection Plan commenced in July 2013 with a minimum of 1,000 per annum completed. Local Authority Inspectors have powers to enter sites and inspect DWWTS. Following inspection, the Local Authority issues an inspection report and an advisory notice where the DWWTS contravenes regulations and/or is a risk to human health or the environment. The advisory notice directs the homeowner owner to remedy the matters outlined in the notice by a specified date and may specify measures to be taken. You can find out more about the inspection process on the [EPA website](#).

The Local Authority Waters Programme Office is a Local Authority shared service set up in 2018, as a measure under the River Basin Management Plan and consists of scientists with a wide range of

technical expertise. They conduct catchment assessments within priority areas to develop a clearer understanding of the issues impacting on water quality. This involves undertaking desk-top assessments and field work. Through the course of their work they may identify DWWTS that are or may be causing a threat to the environment. These homeowners will receive a letter from the LAWPRO regarding the potential risk from the DWWTS and possible eligibility for grant (see further below).

Grants

Grants of 85% up to a maximum of €5,000 are available to fix DWWTS under the following grant schemes:

- **National Inspection Plan:** Grants are available to fix septic tank systems that fail inspection by a Local Authority under the National Inspection Plan and need remediation, repair, upgrading or replacement. The homeowner will receive an advisory notice from the Local Authority requiring the system to be fixed. The Local Authority will also handle the grant application.
- **High Status Objective Catchment Areas:** Grants are available to fix septic tank systems in these areas that are or may be causing a threat to the environment and need remediation, repair, upgrading or replacement. You can check if you are in these areas by inputting your EIRCODE in a map (see link below) and apply to the Local Authority for the grant.
- **Priority Areas for Action:** Grants are available to fix septic tank systems in these areas that are or may be causing a threat to the environment and need remediation, repair, upgrading or replacement. These systems will be identified by the Local Authority Waters Programme Office who will issue a letter confirming eligibility to apply. The homeowner can then apply to the Local Authority for the grant.

Routine maintenance, servicing or de-sludging do not qualify for grants.

Details of Terms & Conditions and the map for High Status Objective Catchment Areas are available from the [Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government](#).

All grants are administered by Local Authorities (City & County Councils). Contact your Local Authority Rural Water Section if you require further information or wish to enquire about an application.

Engage a competent person

- Check that the person you are engaging has an appropriate qualification and relevant experience in design and installation of DWWTS as applicable. The person who designs the DWWTS may not be the same person to install and commission it.
- Verify any claims made by any potential wastewater professional about being a member affiliated with or recognised by a professional/trade body. Check with that body what membership means and ask if the body has complaint procedures for its members.
- Check if different wastewater professionals charge the same costs for their services. Shop around for a competitive price but be careful to ensure that they have the appropriate qualifications and experience to do the job.

Be careful about unsolicited advice

Be cautious of any individuals calling to your home posing as inspectors or as service providers. Be careful to check and verify their identification and certificate of appointment (for Local Authority inspectors). In the case of Local Authority inspections under the national Inspection Plan, you will be notified of any inspection in advance by your Local Authority.

Your consumer rights

Consumers have legal rights when employing a person acting in the course of a business or profession to carry out a service. In employing a wastewater professional, you are availing of a service and have consumer rights. You therefore have a right to expect that the wastewater professional has the necessary skill to carry out the work and that he/she will carry out the work with due care and diligence. If the service is not carried out properly you have a right under law to redress from the service provider.

What standards do I need to meet?

DWWTS must not be a risk to human health or the environment and must meet the requirements in the Domestic Waste Water Treatment Systems Regulations, S.I. 223 of 2012. The remediation solution should be such that it embraces best practice. Remediation of existing DWWTS may have regard to the techniques, technologies and solutions set out in the EPA Code of Practice: Wastewater Treatment Systems Serving Single Houses (p.e. <10) (EPA, 2009) but it is not bound by the full requirements of the code. The wastewater professional should demonstrate that the proposed solution will result in protection of human health and the environment. The professional should work with the Local Authority and the homeowner to come up with the cost-effective solution for the site having regard to the requirements to protect human health and the environment.

Do I need planning permission?

There is guidance on this in the Terms and Conditions issued for the grant schemes (see link above). Where there is any uncertainty, a person can request a written declaration from their Local Authority.

Buying a new system

Once your wastewater professional has completed an assessment and has given you a written report including his/her recommendation of the range of DWWTS available, you should then consider the following having regard to any planning requirements/Advisory Notice conditions:

- New systems must comply with the Building Regulations and therefore should meet the CEN 12566 standard. This applies to both septic tanks and secondary treatment systems.
- Shop Around – contact a number of suppliers of the range of systems you require and discuss your needs and what they have to offer.
- Ask for a brochure (if available) describing their system in good detail to ensure that it is what you want/need for your site. Ensure that any specifications detailed in the Site Assessor/Designer's recommendation match the specifications detailed in the system being offered to you.
- Ask about the capacity/volume of the system and check that it will meet your immediate and long-term needs.
- Ask for a written quotation of the cost of supply and installation of the system at your location.

- All systems, including those installed by a third party, should be supervised and certified by a competent person and documentation should be provided to the consumer.
- In all cases systems are required to be maintained in accordance with the Code of Practice: Wastewater Treatment Systems serving Single Houses (p.e. <10) (EPA, 2009).
- Ask also for a written breakdown of the maintenance costs of the system. Price information in relation to maintenance costs should be very clear in any advertising relating to costs of these systems, as maintenance is an inherent part of the system and the maintenance costs form part of the overall cost of the system.
- Where a contract for the purchase and maintenance of a particular system is presented to you prior to purchase, it is strongly recommended to read this contract in detail and to query any terms and conditions that you do not fully understand. If there are any discrepancies between what you may have agreed verbally with the supplier and what is stated in the contract you should question these with the supplier and have any necessary amendments made to the contract prior to signing.
- Do not rush into making a decision about any particular product /supplier as this is a substantial purchase for any consumer. Any purchase should only be made or contract agreed when you are fully satisfied with all aspects of your purchase.

Installation of a new system

- The homeowner is legally responsible for the operation of their wastewater treatment system in accordance with Part 4A of the Water Services Act, 2007 (as amended) and associated regulations. Correct installation and maintenance are critical in ensuring correct operation of all wastewater treatment systems and protection of public health and the environment. Homeowners are advised to obtain relevant documentation from the installer/manufacturer in relation to installation and maintenance including costs. It is also important that maintenance contracts be renewed periodically. Certification by a competent person of installation may be required in planning conditions and should be checked with the local authority. All documentation should be retained for future reference.

De-commissioning disused tanks

Abandoned/disused septic tanks can pose a risk to human health and the environment and they should be properly de-commissioned. General guidelines are as follows:

- Locate the septic tank and uncover the top of the tank (generally 30 – 60 cms below ground level). Do not enter the tank.
- Have the septic tank wastewater (liquid and sludge) pumped out completely by a licensed hauler. It is important to pump the wastewater, as it contains bacteria and viruses that could make you or your family ill. Keep the pumping receipt as it acts as proof of pumping.
- Fill in the septic tank completely with sand, gravel or soil and put the access lid(s) back in place, or demolish the tank.

Group sewage schemes

In certain situations where the ground conditions are unsuitable for conventional systems, the most cost-effective solution for a group of houses may be a group sewage scheme. These are similar to the group water schemes whereby a group of individuals come together to treat their wastewater or lay

a private sewer to connect to the public sewer. A grant may be available under the Rural Water Programme, which is administrated by the Local Authorities on behalf of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Discharge licences

Any discharge from a DWWTS including the percolation area/polishing filter directly to surface water requires a Water Pollution Act discharge licence issued from the Local Authority. Contact your Local Authority environment section for further information.

Alternative technologies

The *Code of Practice: Waste Water Treatment and Disposal Systems serving Single Houses (p.e.<10)* allows for the use of innovative products and technologies, not specifically covered by the CoP so long as they are certified, are fit for the purpose for which they are intended and meet the performance requirements of the CoP. While upgrades do not have to meet the full requirements of the code it would be prudent to have regard to the provision for alternative technologies.

There is potential to reduce the water consumption in households. Reduced water consumption means reduced wastewater production which is particularly attractive for domestic waste water treatment systems in low permeability subsoils where reductions in effluent load should improve the functioning of the soil attenuation system. For further information on water saving devices is contained in an EPA published report [Water saving technologies to reduce water consumption and wastewater production.](#)

Further information

Webpages:

Environmental Protection Agency

[Guidance for householders](http://www.epa.ie/water/dw/hhinfo/) - <http://www.epa.ie/water/dw/hhinfo/>

[Code of Practice](http://www.epa.ie/water/wastewater/guidance/cop/) - <http://www.epa.ie/water/wastewater/guidance/cop/>

Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

[DWWTS grants](http://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-quality/domestic-waste-water-systemsseptic-tanks/domestic-waste-water-treatment-1) <http://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-quality/domestic-waste-water-systemsseptic-tanks/domestic-waste-water-treatment-1>

[Well grants](https://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/grant-provision-or-neccessary-improvment-individual-water) <https://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/grant-provision-or-neccessary-improvment-individual-water>

Citizens Information

[septic tanks page](http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/housing/owning_a_home/home_owners/domestic_wastewater_treatment.html) - http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/housing/owning_a_home/home_owners/domestic_wastewater_treatment.html

Leaflets:

[Have you completed a septic tank system check?](#)

<https://www.catchments.ie/download/septic-tank-system-check/>

[Wastewater systems for building a house](#)

<http://www.epa.ie/pubs/advice/water/wastewater/wastewatersystemsforbuildingahouse.html>

[Wastewater systems when buying or selling a house](#)

<http://www.epa.ie/pubs/advice/water/wastewater/septic-tank-wastewater-systems-when-buying-or-selling-a-house.html>

[How to safely spread sludge from your septic tank](#)

<http://www.epa.ie/pubs/advice/water/wastewater/how-to-safely-spread-sludge-from-your-septic-tank.html>

[Have you checked your well water supply?](#)

<http://www.epa.ie/pubs/advice/drinkingwater/SS%20Wells%20Web.pdf>

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