

ON-SITE SEWAGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM POLICY

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The Hornsby Local Government Area contains approximately 2,800 on-site sewage management systems.

These systems, when not correctly operated or maintained can create environmental and human health impacts, including toxic algal blooms, the transmission of viruses, and implications to our oyster farming industry.

To ensure on-site sewage management systems are functioning appropriately, and public health and the natural environment is protected, Council has prepared a draft On-site Sewage Management System Policy which seeks to implement a licensing and audit program for all systems within the Shire.

Why is an On-Site Sewage Management System Policy needed?

Local councils are required under the Local Government Act 1993 to issue licences for the installation and ongoing operation of on-site sewage management systems.

In recent years, Council has issued approvals for on-site sewage management systems with a reliance on property owners and service technicians to inspect and self-regulate the systems.

The draft On-Site Sewage Management System Policy provides a practical framework for Council officers to licence, regulate and undertake audits of on-site sewage management systems in order to protect human health and the natural environment from defective or failing systems.

What areas of the Hornsby Shire will be included in the Policy?

The draft Policy includes all properties that contain an on-site sewage management system that requires a licence issued by Council in order to operate the system. This includes all systems where sewage cannot be directly discharged to a public sewer, and those which are not specifically licensed and/or regulated by the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA).

How often will my system be audited and licensed?

Every system is required to have a licence prior to the installation of a system, known as an 'Approval to Install', followed by a licence for the ongoing operation of the system, known as an 'Approval to Operate'. These licences are issued by Council in accordance with the Local Government Act 1993.

The draft Policy proposes to renew Approval to Operate licences every seven years and an audit undertaken of each system within the seven year licence period to ensure compliance with licence conditions.

Audits of all on-site sewage management systems will be undertaken sequentially based on their level of risk to the environment and public health, over a seven year period. Systems are defined as either high, medium or low risk as follows:

High risk systems

High risk systems are generally defined as those systems located in close proximity to recognised recreational swimming, oyster harvest areas or oyster lease areas.

Medium risk systems

Medium risk systems are generally defined as those systems not located in close proximity to recognised recreational swimming, oyster harvest areas or oyster lease areas, and those systems that are not defined as Aerated Wastewater Treatment Systems.

Low risk systems

Low risk systems are generally defined as those systems that use sensitive biological agents and chemical processes to produce a higher quality effluent than a standard septic tank. These systems are commonly known as Aerated Wastewater Treatment Systems (AWTS) and have been identified as low risk given the required regular inspections and maintenance of the systems in accordance with the requirements of NSW Health.

Audits will be sequentially undertaken, based on a system's level of risk. High risk systems audited at the commencement of the seven year program, followed by medium risk and low risk systems. Council will also prioritise inspections of systems where complaints are received or property owners request an inspection.

In situations where Council's audit identifies that a system has failed and/or has the potential to cause significant environmental pollution or impact to public health, the risk level for a system may be re-evaluated. Further, in these scenarios, it may be deemed appropriate for Council to issue a lesser licensing period.

Will I be made aware that Council intends to inspect my system?

Yes. Property owners will be given notification in writing of Council's intention to inspect their on-site sewage management system. If an owner wishes to be present at the time of Council's inspection, they will be given an opportunity to contact Council and arrange a mutually suitable time for the inspection to take place during regular business hours.

When a Council Officer attends a property and is unable to gain access to the on-site sewage management system or complete an inspection, the property owner will be contacted and a suitable time arranged for the inspection to be completed.

What happens if Council is not satisfied that my system is operating correctly? Will I be fined?

If your system is found to be defective as a result of Council's audit program, Council's officer will seek your cooperation to repair the system as soon as possible, in order to prevent a possible environmental pollution incident or affect human health.

Should system owners be uncooperative, or rectification of the issues not be achieved in a reasonable timeframe, Council may commence enforcement action to resolve the matter.

Will I be charged for the Approval to Operate licence and audit of my system?

An annual fee will be charged to all system owners, subject to CPI changes. This fee will enable Council to provide a service to monitor and regulate on-site sewage management systems through audits and issue licences to system owners every seven years.

The annual fee will be charged against your Rates Notice in accordance with Council's adopted Fees and Charges.

It is noted that residents who are connected to Sydney Water's sewer line also pay annual wastewater service fees for the operation and maintenance of the sewer network.

I have an aerated wastewater treatment system which is inspected by a service technician every quarter. Will I still be required to pay fees to Council?

Yes. Aerated Wastewater Treatment Systems (AWTS) are still required to be licensed every seven years in accordance with the Local Government Act 1993. Council officers will also inspect these systems to ensure they are operating in accordance with the conditions of Council's Approval to Operate licence.

I've recently moved into a property that has an on-site sewage management system. How will I be advised of my licensing responsibilities and Approval to Operate expiration date?

Where a change in ownership of a property occurs, an Approval to Operate licence will be issued to new property owners once Council receives information pertaining to the property transfer. Licence expiration dates and system requirements will be detailed in the licence.

I've recently connected to Sydney Water's sewer line via a Pressure Sewerage System. Will my on-site collection tank be required to be inspected and licensed by Council?

No. Properties in Galston, Glenorie, Brooklyn, Dangar Island, Mount Kuring-gai and Cowan that have connected to Sydney Water's sewer line via a Pressure Sewerage System do not require an inspection or licence by Council. At the time of connection to the Sydney Water sewer line, your on-site wastewater system was required to be decommissioned and replaced with equipment that transfers wastewater to the Sydney Water wastewater pipe network in your street. These types of connections are also known as a 'Pump-to-Sewer' connection.

Whilst Pressure Sewerage Systems are located on private property, their equipment, including the collection tank and grinder pump, alarm control panel, boundary kit and property discharge pipe, is owned and maintained by Sydney Water. Home owners are responsible for all of the wastewater pipes and fittings inside the home up to the connection point of the Pressure Sewage System.

Property owners who are connected to Sydney Water's sewer by a Pressure Sewerage System pay annual wastewater service fees for their sewer connection. The service fees enable Sydney Water to carry out inspections of the Pressure Sewerage System equipment as part of their maintenance and safety program. These inspections ensure the equipment is kept in good working condition.

Where can I find more information about on-site sewage management systems?

Further information, including Approval to Install and Operate application forms, can be found on Council's website: www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au.

Guidelines for wastewater systems and their correct operation can also be found on NSW Health's website: www.health.nsw.gov.au

Applicable legislation for on-site sewage management systems including the Local Government Act 1993, Local Government (General) Regulation 2005, and the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 can be found at <https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/>