

## On-site Wastewater Management Training Course

### Primary Treatment

### Septic Systems

Centre for Environmental Training



## Septic Tank

- Is the most common type of domestic primary treatment system
- Use can be traced back to about 1860 in France and about 1900 in Australia
- Current designs have changed little
- Septic systems and trenches provide the only form of wastewater treatment in many rural communities

Centre for Environmental Training



## Septic Tank

- Sealed tank prevents ingress and egress and reduces risk of odours, contamination, insects and vermin
- Provides a quiescent environment in which wastewater can settle and clarify between a settled sludge layer (below) and a surface scum layer (above)
- Accumulated sludge is periodically removed
- Clarified effluent passes downstream to land application or further treatment

Centre for Environmental Training



## AS/NZS1546:1

Details of septic tanks are provided in *AS/NZS1546:1 On-site domestic wastewater treatment units Part 1: Septic tanks*, which covers:

- Performance requirements and criteria
- Design and fittings
- Materials and testing

In NSW, for flows up to 2,000L/day or 10EP, septic tank must be NSW Health accredited:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/domesticwastewater/Pages/stcw.aspx>

Centre for Environmental Training



## Septic Tanks

- Watertight, durable concrete, glass fibre reinforced resin or plastic tank



Source: Midwest Concrete



Source: Access Septic



Source: Everhard Industries

Centre for Environmental Training



## Septic Tanks

- Cylindrical, with vertical or horizontal axis, or rectangular in shape



Source: Grahams Concrete Pty Ltd



Source: Tumbay Bay Concrete Pty Ltd



Source: Hynds NZ

Centre for Environmental Training



## Baffles

- May include a partition or baffle divider to assist with hydraulic buffering and reduce carry-over of solids
- Baffle required if tank is >2,050L capacity (NSW Health 2016)

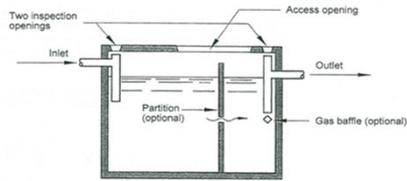


Centre for Environmental Training



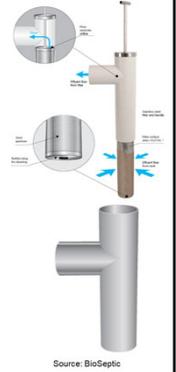
## Septic Tank Access

- Inverted inlet and outlet fittings, with inspection openings above for access and pump-out



Source: Standards Australia

Centre for Environmental Training



Source: BioSeptic

## Septic Tank Installation

- In ground, with top of tank at or just above ground surface to prevent stormwater ingress



Centre for Environmental Training



## Risers

- If installed below ground a watertight riser is fitted to support access and inspection covers



Centre for Environmental Training



## Ground Anchors

- Ground anchors may be required to prevent hydrostatic uplift



Centre for Environmental Training



## Primary Treatment

A number of simple processes operate in a septic tank:

- Sedimentation
- Flocculation
- Flotation
- Anaerobic digestion
- Clarification

Centre for Environmental Training



## Sedimentation

- Achieved by density settling in quiescent conditions
- Aided by the flocculation of suspended particles into larger aggregates
- Removes >60% of the suspended solids load
- Sludge or biosolids accumulates at base of tank

Centre for Environmental Training



## Flotation

- Fats, oils, grease, surfactants and other low density materials rise to the surface and form a scum layer
- Scum retained in the tank by an inverted outlet pipe (tee) or baffle
- Fully formed scum layer precludes oxygen, creates anaerobic conditions which assists in the breakdown of organic solids and prevents escape of odours

Centre for Environmental Training



## Scum Layer or Crust



Centre for Environmental Training



## Scum Layer or Crust



Centre for Environmental Training



## Anaerobic Digestion

- Organic material retained at the base of the tank undergoes microbiologically facilitated facultative and anaerobic decomposition
- Organic material is converted to stable compounds and gases such as carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) and hydrogen sulphide (H<sub>2</sub>S)
- Retained sludge comprised mainly of lignous material that is difficult to decompose and will continue to accumulate

Centre for Environmental Training



## Clarification

- Settled and skimmed wastewater retained within the central portion of the septic tank
- Re-suspension of settled solids is minimised under quiescent conditions
- Tanks are appropriately sized to allow for maximum solids settling
- Effluent is drawn from the clarified liquid between the sludge and scum layers and discharged for further treatment

Centre for Environmental Training



## Septic Tank

- Provides capacity for a minimum of 24 hours hydraulic residence time for daily flow @ 150L/person/day
- Provides storage capacity for accumulated sludge @ 80L/person/year (with 5 year pumpout frequency (NSW Guidelines 2025))
- Prevents scum from moving downstream
- Starts microbiological degradation to reduce BOD<sub>5</sub>, pathogens and settled solids

Centre for Environmental Training



## Septic Tank Capacity (AS/NZS1547:2012)

All-waste septic tank capacities

Persons	Bedrooms	Average daily flow (L)	Tank capacity
1 - 5	1-3	Up to 1,000L	3,000L
6 - 7	4	1,000 - 1,400L	3,500L
8	5	1,400 - 1,600L	4,000L
9 - 10	6	1,600 - 2,000L	4,500L

Source: Standards Australia Standards New Zealand

- Note tank size requirements for larger houses

Centre for Environmental Training



## Septic Tank Capacity (NSW Guidelines 2025)

Design Occupancy (EP)	Daily Hydraulic Load (L/day)	Minimum Septic Tank Capacity (L)
3 (Tiny House)	275	1,350
3	450	1,650
4	600	2,200
5	750	2,750
6	900	3,300
7	1,050	3,850
8	1,200	4,400
9	1,350	4,950
10	1,500	5,500

- Add 600L for 300L spa bath

Centre for Environmental Training



## Sludge Accumulation

- Sludge in a residential all-waste septic tank accumulates at approximately 80L/person/year
- Pumpout interval is determined by tank capacity required for 24-hour residence time for daily load (varies from system to system)
- For example, a 3,000L septic tank provides 24-hour residence time for 1,000L daily load, plus up to 2,000L sludge and scum capacity i.e. 5 persons x 80L/person/year x 5 years

Centre for Environmental Training



## Sludge Accumulation

Assess sludge and scum accumulation in a septic tank using either:

- Sludge Judge
- Sludge Depth Indicator (electronic)
- Pressure sensor operated septic tank monitoring system (fitted in tank)

Centre for Environmental Training



## Sludge Judge



Centre for Environmental Training



## Septic Tank Effluent Quality

Parameter	Untreated domestic wastewater	Primary treated effluent
BOD <sub>5</sub>	200 - 300 mg/L	~ 150 mg/L
Suspended Solids	200 - 300 mg/L	~ 50 mg/L
Total Nitrogen	20 - 100 mg/L	50 - 60 mg/L
Total Phosphorus	10 - 25 mg/L	10 - 15 mg/L
Faecal Coliforms	10 <sup>3</sup> - 10 <sup>10</sup> cfu/100mL	10 <sup>5</sup> - 10 <sup>7</sup> cfu/100mL

Source: NSW DLG

Centre for Environmental Training



## Primary Treatment

- Capable of removing approximately 25-35% of the BOD<sub>5</sub> load and more than 60% of the suspended solids load in raw domestic wastewater
- Solids accumulate in the base of the septic tank and liquids are discharged for further treatment
- Floating material (scum) accumulates on the liquid surface and provides an air tight seal, creating anaerobic conditions

Centre for Environmental Training



## Outcomes

- Moderate reduction in the TN load
- Slight reduction in the TP load
- Limited pathogen removal
- High bacterial counts remain in effluent
- Septic tank effluent not suitable for direct environmental discharge
- Secondary treatment using aerobic processes (AWTS or sand filter etc.) or further treatment in a soil based system is required

Centre for Environmental Training



## Outlet Filters

- Outlet filter improves standard septic tank performance
- Recommended for all septic systems in NSW, especially with Primary effluent in LPED or mound systems
- Filters of various designs are commercially available and can reduce the impacts of solids carry over to the land application area or secondary treatment system
- Should prevent discharge of solids >3mm particle size and achieve TSS <100mg/L
- Filters have a large surface area to limit clogging and reduce maintenance requirements
- Require regular inspection and cleaning

Centre for Environmental Training



## Septic Tank Outlet Filters



Centre for Environmental Training



## Fitting a Septic Tank Outlet Filter



Centre for Environmental Training



## Fitting a Septic Tank Outlet Filter



Centre for Environmental Training 

## Cleaning a Septic Tank Outlet Filter



Centre for Environmental Training 

## Outlet Filter Performance

Parameter	Concentration (mg/L)			% Improvement
	Typical ST effluent	Without effluent filter	With effluent filter	
BOD <sub>5</sub>	450	180	130	28%
TSS	503	80	50	38%
NH <sub>3</sub> -N	41	40	40	0%
Org. N-N	29	28	28	0%
TKN-N	70	68	68	0%
Org. P-P	6.5	6	6	0%
Inorg. P-P	11	10	10	0%
TP	17	16	16	0%
Oil and grease	164	25	15	40%

Source: Crites & Tchobanoglous 1998

Centre for Environmental Training 

## References

- Care and maintenance of residential septic systems (2002) B3583, University of Wisconsin-Extension.
- Bounds, T.R., "Design and Performance of Septic Tanks," Site Characterization and Design of Onsite Septic Systems ASTM STP 901, M.S. Bedinger, A.I. Johnson, and J.S. Fleming, Eds., American Society for Testing Materials, Philadelphia, 1997.
- Stafford, D. and Whitehead J.H. 2005. *Septic Tank Outlet Filters*. In Patterson, R.A. and Jones, M.J. eds. *On-site '05 Performance Assessment of On-site Systems*. Lanfax Laboratories, Armidale, September 2005.

Centre for Environmental Training 

## References

- Stafford, D. and Whitehead J.H. 2007. *Performance of Septic Tank Outlet Filters*. In Patterson, R.A. and Jones, M.J. eds. *On-site '07 Innovation and Technology for On-site Systems*. Lanfax Laboratories. Armidale, September 2007.
- How to decommission an OWMS (septic tank). [www.onsiteisite.com](http://www.onsiteisite.com) Members Area, Information Repository.

Centre for Environmental Training 

# Septic Tank Calculations

## Question 1.

A new three bedroom house is supplied with reticulated water and has a 3,000L septic tank installed on construction. Assume that five people occupy the house.

- (i) Calculate the daily hydraulic load based on a design hydraulic load of 150L/person/day.

---

- (ii) Calculate the detention time of effluent in the septic tank at the outset.

---

---

---

- (iii) If sludge accumulates at the rate of 80L/person/year, calculate the amount of sludge that will accumulate in one year.

---

## Question 2.

An older three bedroom house is supplied with reticulated water and is occupied by three people. On inspection, it is determined that the septic tank is of 2,300L capacity, but the tank is half full of sludge.

- (i) Calculate the daily hydraulic load based on a design hydraulic load of 150L/person/day.

---

- (ii) Calculate the annual sludge accumulation based on a sludge accumulation rate of 80L/person/year.

---

- (iii) A minimum of 24 hours detention must be maintained in the tank at all times. Calculate the length of time remaining before a pumpout will be required.

---

---

---

# Septic Tank Calculations

## ANSWERS

### Question 1.

- (i) Daily hydraulic load =  $5 \times 150\text{L/person/day} = 750\text{L/day}$
- (ii) Septic tank volume = 3,000L  
Daily hydraulic load = 750L/day  
Detention time =  $3,000\text{L} / 750\text{L/day} = 4 \text{ days}$
- (iii) Occupancy = 5 persons  
Sludge accumulation rate = 80L/person/year  
Annual sludge accumulation =  $5 \text{ persons} \times 80\text{L/person/year} = 400\text{L/year}$

### Question 2.

- (i) Daily hydraulic load =  $3 \times 150\text{L/person/day} = 450\text{L/day}$
- (ii) Occupancy = 3 persons  
Sludge accumulation rate = 80L/person/year  
Annual sludge accumulation rate =  $3 \text{ persons} \times 80\text{L/person/year} = 240\text{L/year}$
- (iii) Tank capacity = 2,300L  
Daily hydraulic load = 450L  
Volume of sludge in tank =  $2,300\text{L} / 2 = 1,150\text{L}$   
Volume available for further sludge accumulation =  $1,150\text{L} - 450\text{L} = 700\text{L}$   
Sludge accumulation rate = 240L / year  
Maximum time remaining prior to pumpout  $700\text{L} / 240\text{L/year} = 2.9 \text{ years}$