


NSW Onsite Wastewater Management Guidelines, 2025

Training for Regulators and Designers

Introduction to the new Guidelines

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It's been a while...

- The Environment & Health Protection Guidelines: On-site Sewage Management for Single Households (Department of Local Government) was published in 1998 (28 years ago)
- A few things have changed in Onsite Wastewater Management (OWM) since that time
 - New technology, new terms, risk-based design, larger domestic systems

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Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
Office of Local Government
olg.nsw.gov.au



Onsite Wastewater Management Guidelines

April 2025

The new Guidelines aren't silver!

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Why did we need a new Guideline?

- Most OWMS in NSW are regulated by councils
- Each council interprets and implements the legislation and guidelines individually
- OWMS performance is more variable than centralised sewerage systems:
 - Performance and accountability requirements are less clearly understood
 - Individual operation

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Previous guidance documents

- The previous Guidelines (1998)
- Australian Standards (AS/NZS 1547:2012 and AS1546 1-4)
- WaterNSW Current Recommended Practice
- NSW Health accreditation guidelines (**Advisory Notes now withdrawn**)
- Mixed NSW government guidelines (DEC, DPI)
- Interstate and international guidelines

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What the new Guidelines are (p.13)

- They are management guidelines, not a design and operations manual
- Guidance on the interpretation of regulatory standards
- Practical ways for councils to manage safe and sustainable OWM using best practice techniques
- They sit beside the relevant Australian Standards
- Used to update council OWM strategies

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What is the same?

- The new Guidelines provide guidance for regulators, designers and users
- Local Government Act and Regulation **performance standards** remain the backbone of the Guidelines (s.29 – 30, s.44 of LG Regulation)
- Resources for regulators and designers
- The aim is to protect human health and the environment by improving OWM

What has changed?

- The new Guidelines are a **best practice guide**
- They **aren't** called up in the Local Government (General) Regulation 2021 s.29 (3)
- Councils must consider the Guidelines and either **adopt or adapt** them to suit their requirements
- The Guidelines consolidate and concentrate information into one document
- 100 more pages, but easily navigated using the bookmarks and search ("Find") functions (PDF)

When they don't apply

- Drinking Water Catchment and Priority Oyster Aquaculture Area requirements take precedence over this Guideline, where relevant
- Variation from the Guidelines is allowed based on risk-based assessment and design to meet the performance standards (LG Act and Regulation)
- This allows for flexibility in designs and approvals, provided they are supported by evidence and meet the requirements of statutory authorities

What has changed? Risk management

- Assessments and designs are based on assessing the constraints on a site and managing or mitigating the risks that OWM poses to human health and the environment
- Less prescriptive information. More ranges of values to be used, dependent on the conditions on the site
- For example, buffer distances vary depending on effluent treatment level, application technique, soils, slopes, sensitivity of receiving feature, etc.

What has changed? Larger flows

- Daily flows up to 5,000L/day of domestic wastewaters (p.11 and Section 5):
 - To align with Australian Standard 1546.3: 2017 Secondary Treatment Systems
 - To cover a larger proportion of OWMS designs and approvals undertaken by regulators and designers
 - Doesn't include trade waste and non-domestic development (Section 5.1.2)

What has changed? Terms

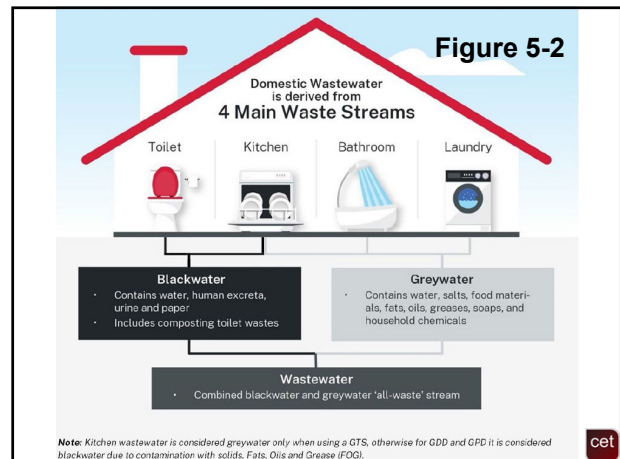
- OWMS – Onsite wastewater management – to incorporate more than just sewage
- SMF – Sewage management facility – to align with the LG Regulation
- EAA – Effluent application area – to align with the LG Regulation
- Tertiary treatment processes – processes including disinfection and nutrient reduction

What has changed? Terms

- Domestic wastewater – “Domestic wastewaters are those originating from households or personal activities including water closets, urinals, kitchens, bathrooms and laundries


Domestic wastewater can include wastewater flows from facilities serving staff, employees, residents or guests in institutional, industrial, commercial or recreational establishments, but excludes trade wastes from industrial, commercial or home business sources.” (p.11)

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Kitchen wastewater

- Kitchen wastewater is considered greywater when treated in a greywater treatment system (GTS), but blackwater when in a greywater diversion device (GDD) or greywater processing device (GPD) (Section 5.1.1)
- Kitchen wastewater has contamination with solids (food particles), fats, oils and grease
- The exemption for GDD (s. 75 of Local Government (General) Regulation 2021) doesn't relate to kitchen wastewater, or OWMS

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What has changed? Terms and technology

- PPS – Passive Polishing System – soil based effluent application systems that receive primary treated effluent (or more advanced) and provide a degree of treatment prior to percolation directly into the natural soil
 - PPS aren't SMF, so aren't accredited, but they must follow AS/NZS1547:2012 (NSW Health Advisory Note 6 (Passive Disposal Systems) – now withdrawn)
 - Includes mounds, amended soil mounds, bottomless sand filters and proprietary PPS

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Commercial and non-domestic OWM

- The Guidelines don't cover systems >5,000L/day or non-domestic OWMS (Section 5.1.2)
- They do cover domestic wastewater from commercial facilities (<5,000L/day)
- Domestic wastewater doesn't include trade waste (non-domestic development and home businesses)
- Industrial and commercial wastewater varies widely in character, and often requires specialised treatment processes to manage contaminants

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Commercial and non-domestic OWM

- The Guidelines recommend the use of experienced designers for commercial systems and those generating trade waste
- It is recommended to consult the Liquid Trade Waste Management Guidelines (DPIE 2021) for suitable pre-treatments for various activities
- OWMS design can impact municipal sewage treatment plant performance through septage, which contains concentrated contaminants

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References

DPHI, Office of Local Government 2025. *Onsite Wastewater Management Guidelines*

<https://www.olg.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-02/onsite-wastewater-management-guidelines.pdf>

Australian Standards (AS/NZS 1547:2012 and AS1546 1-4)

<https://www.standards.org.au/standards-catalogue/standard-details?designation=as-nzs-1547-2012>

<https://www.standards.org.au/standards-catalogue/standard-details?designation=as-nzs-1546-1-2008> etc.

WaterNSW 2023. *Designing and Installing Onsite Wastewater Systems*

<https://www.watersw.com.au/documents/crps/general-development/onsite-sewage/Designing-and-Installing-On-Site-Wastewater-Systems.pdf>

NSW Health Accreditation Guidelines

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

NSW Health Advisory Notes – **now withdrawn**

DPIE 2021. Liquid Trade Waste Management Guidelines

<https://www.water.dcccew.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-07/trade-waste-management-guidelines.pdf>

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