



***Comparison between NSW Guidelines:
Environment and Health Protection Guidelines: On-site Sewage
Management for Single Households (January 1998) (The Silver Book)
and Onsite Wastewater Management Guidelines (April 2025)***

Executive Summary

This document provides a content-only comparison between the NSW Environment and Health Protection Guidelines: On-site Sewage Management for Single Households (January 1998) and the Onsite Wastewater Management Guidelines (April 2025).

The comparison excludes formatting and layout changes and focuses solely on substantive differences in policy intent, regulatory scope, technical guidance, and operational expectations.

Overall, the 2025 Guidelines modernise and significantly expand the 1998 framework. While the core objectives of protecting public health and the environment remain unchanged, the newer Guidelines reflect:

- An expanded scope beyond single households to include larger and non-domestic systems,
- Updated legislative and regulatory frameworks,
- A shift from advisory guidance toward operational and enforceable requirements for councils,
- Greater technical sophistication, including risk-based assessment and modelling tools,
- Clearer allocation of responsibilities to councils, owners, designers, installers and service agents, and
- Recognition of emerging technologies and new development types such as tiny houses.

In practical terms, councils are expected to take a more active regulatory and monitoring role under the 2025 Guidelines, supported by risk-based strategies, routine inspections, and contemporary compliance tools. The 1998 document remains relevant as a policy foundation, but the 2025 Guidelines represent the current best-practice and regulatory benchmark for onsite wastewater management in NSW.

See tabulated Content Comparison below:

Content Comparison: OSSM 1998 vs OWM Guidelines 2025

Topic area	1998 Silver Book	2025 Guidelines	Content difference
Scope of systems	Single households only; up to 2,000 L/day	All onsite wastewater systems including non-domestic up to 5,000 L/day	Expanded scope beyond single households
Terminology	On-site sewage management (OSSM)	Onsite wastewater management (OWM / OWMS)	Updated terminology aligned to legislation
Regulatory framework	LG Act 1993; Clean Waters Act; Public Health Act 1991	LG Act 1993; LG Regulation 2021; POEO Act 1997; Public Health Act 2010	Modernised legislation and removal of superseded Acts
Role of councils	OSMS encouraged	OWM Strategy expected with risk-based programs	Stronger operational expectations for councils
Performance standards	Broad environmental and health objectives	Explicit reference to LG Regulation s.44 performance standards	Clear statutory benchmarks added
Risk management	Implicit through planning and assessment	Explicit risk-based inspection and regulation framework	Formal risk management introduced
Accreditation	NSW Health accreditation referenced in general terms	Detailed accreditation, exemptions, and non-accredited pathways	Greater regulatory clarity
Technical depth	Conservative design guidance	Advanced modelling (nutrient balance, viral die-off, Linear Loading Rate (LLR))	Higher technical sophistication
Emerging systems	Not addressed	Explicit recognition of emerging and advanced systems	New technology covered
Tiny houses	Not mentioned	Specific tiny house provisions	New development type included
Compliance and enforcement	General approvals and orders	Detailed compliance tools under POEO and LG Acts	More prescriptive enforcement guidance

References:

NSW DLG 1998. *Environment and Health Protection Guidelines: On-site Sewage Management for Single Households* (January 1998).

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

AI generated, E McRorie 16 April 2026. Reviewed with minor amendments, J Whitehead 20 April 2026. cet 2026