

On-site Wastewater Management Training Course

Secondary Treatment

Aerated Wastewater Treatment Systems (AWTS)

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Aerated Wastewater Treatment Systems (AWTS)

- Mechanical secondary treatment systems incorporating aeration
- Mirror treatment processes of larger wastewater treatment plants using small tank(s) suited to a domestic setting
- Known as Aerated Wastewater Treatment Systems (AWTS) (AS/NSZ1546.3 2008), or Secondary Treatment Systems (STS) (AS1546.3 2017)
- Also known as Aerated Wastewater Treatment Plants (AWTPs), Aerated Treatment Units (ATUs) or Household Package Plants

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AS1546.3:2017

Australian Standard AS1546.3:2017 *On-site domestic wastewater treatment units, Part 3: Secondary treatment systems* (Standards Australia 2017) covers:

- Performance criteria / design requirements
- Minimum marking requirements
- Information to be provided with the system
- Product conformity evaluation for type testing

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Design Load

AS1546.3:2017 stipulates the following design load characteristics:

- Minimum daily flow of 150 litres per person
- Average daily BOD₅ – 70 grams per person
- Average daily TSS – 70 grams per person
- Average daily total nitrogen – 15 grams per person
- Average daily total phosphorus – 2.5 grams per person

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Variety of Systems

- Wide range of older AWTS (AS/NZS1546.3 2008) and newer STS (AS1546.3 2017) designs and configurations (~100 models on AUS market)
- Large number of Australian and overseas manufacturers (~30 manufacturers)
- Many brands and models discontinued, no longer accredited, but still in operation
- Older systems have often been modified
- New brands and models entering market

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Variety of Systems

- Wide variety of systems and processes, but some similarities due to compliance with the Standards
- Some differences between systems accredited under 2008 and 2017 Standards
- Understanding of basic processes is important
- Performance commonly variable
- Many AWTS prove challenging to operate well
- Evidence is that, at any time, >50% of systems may be operating poorly or failing

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Configurations

- Most systems comprise 1 or 2 tanks, with between 3 and 6 separate chambers
- The tanks are constructed from either concrete, polypropylene or fibreglass



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The Aims of Secondary Treatment

- Improve effluent quality
- Generate effluent which can be applied at higher loading rates than Primary treated effluent
- Reduce land area required for safe disposal
- Reduce impact on receiving environment
- Remove pathogens and possibly some nutrients
- Reduce impact on surface / ground waters
- Provide reuse water for landscaping

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Treatment Stages

Typically four treatment stages:

- Anaerobic digestion (Primary treatment)
- Aerobic digestion (Secondary treatment)
- Clarification (settling)
- Disinfection

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Anaerobic Digestion / Primary Treatment

- Can be in a separate septic tank or chamber(s) within a segmented single tank system
- Minimum of 24 hours detention required to maximise settling and moderate peak flows
- STS Primary chambers ~2,300L - ~3,500L
- Physical, chemical and biological processes:
 - Sedimentation of solids (sludge layer)
 - Flotation (scum layer)
 - Clarification (partial)
 - Anaerobic degradation of organic material (BOD_5)

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Crust and Sludge Accumulation

- Crust important to maintain anaerobic conditions and prevent the escape of gases and odours
- Sludge accumulates at base of tank
- Progressively reduces the effective capacity of system and will require periodic removal



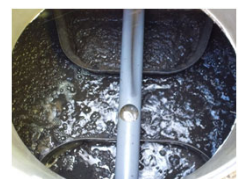
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Anaerobic Upflow Filter

- Accelerates anaerobic breakdown and methane generation
- Improves solids stabilisation
- e.g. FujiClean ACE1200



Source: FujiClean



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Sludge Return

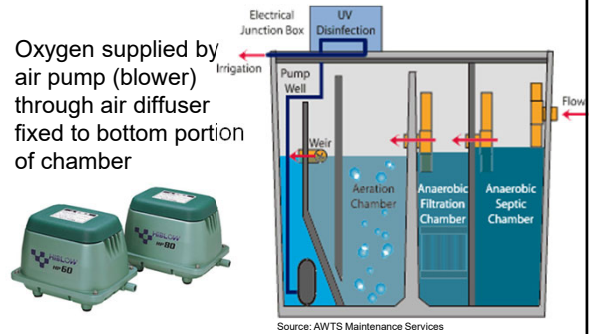
- Returns sludge from the clarification chamber or aeration chamber to the Primary chamber
- Adds to sludge accumulation in Primary chamber
- Return to inlet tee to avoid disturbing crust
- Assists with de-nitrification



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Aeration

- Oxygen supplied by air pump (blower) through air diffuser fixed to bottom portion of chamber



Source: AWTS Maintenance Services

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Aeration

- Oxygen transfer efficiency is highly dependent upon diffuser type and bubble size (surface area)
 - Larger bubbles transfer minimal oxygen to the water
 - Fine bubbles transfer up to 80% of the available oxygen to the water column



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Aeration

- Rising bubbles transfer oxygen to the biomass and mix the wastewater to allow maximum contact with treatment surfaces
- Air promotes oxidation and microbiological consumption of the organic matter
- Factors impacting aerobic treatment are:
 - Volume of oxygen supplied (need to consider additional non-process requirements such as air lifts)
 - Rate/timing of oxygen supply (variable demand)
- Aerobic process requires a dissolved oxygen concentration (DO) >2mg/L

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Aerobic Processes

- Aeration facilitates the conversion of suspended and dissolved organic materials to energy, biomass and wastes
- Efficient process for the removal of:
 - Carbonaceous organic matter (BOD and TOC)
 - Nutrients (N and P), and for
 - Waste (sludge) stabilisation
- Can be by way of:
 - Attached Growth Processes
 - Suspended Growth Processes
- Both can achieve a high level of BOD removal

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Attached Growth Processes

- Fixed or Floating Media (FM) systems
- Trickling Filter (TF) systems
- Rotating Biological Contactor (RBC) systems
- Typically require Primary sedimentation to remove coarse solids and avoid clogging
- Systems typically utilise a high surface area media (mineral or synthetic) or discs or drums to support the growth of a biological film (biofilm)

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Attached Growth Processes

- Inert media comprise plastic tubes, sheets or mesh with large surface area / volume ratio
- Chamber may contain fixed-submerged or free floating media. Fixed media most common
- Microorganisms attach to media to form biofilm
- Wastewater contacts biofilm
- Food is brought to microbes
- Microorganisms consume or convert organic material as part of their metabolic processes
- Attached or 'fixed-film' processes remove fine or dissolved organic matter from wastewater

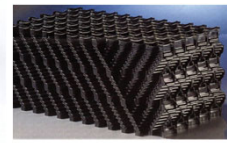
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Attached Growth Fixed Media



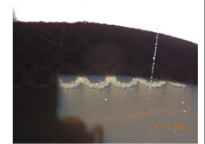
100-300 m²/m³



125-240 m²/m³



Rope media

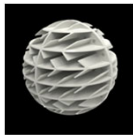


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Attached Growth Floating Media

- Predominantly attached growth, but typically a hybrid of suspended / attached growth processes



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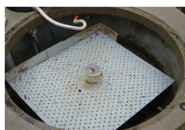
Attached Growth

- Biofilm consists of aerobic and facultative bacteria, fungi, algae and protozoans
- Worms, larvae and snails may also be present in non-submerged systems
- Media are self cleansing – excess biological film sloughs off and is transferred in suspension to the clarification chamber to settle and accumulate
- Oxygen is provided either passively (Trickling Filter and Rotating Biological Contactor) or mechanically by use of an air pump/blower

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Trickling Filter



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Rotating Biological Contactor



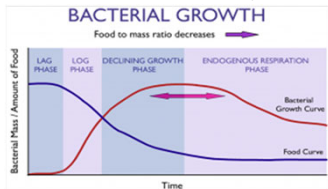
Source: Kingspan

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Aerobic Treatment

- Aeration chambers are sized to ensure endogenous respiration occurs
- Over time dead cell mass and residuals will accumulate in the chamber and will eventually need to be removed by pumpout



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Aerobic Treatment

- Most systems rely on continuous flows
- Have limited capacity to buffer flows and handle shock or intermittent flows.
- Balance tank can be used to even out flow
- Systems require careful consideration of hydraulic and organic loading rates
- Treated effluent requires clarification to remove sloughed biofilms and residual solids
- Some sludge may be returned to the treatment reactor to assist with denitrification

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Aerobic Treatment

- Aerobic treatment can be impacted by a variation in hydraulic or organic loads
- Factors impacting aerobic treatment are:
 - Volume/rate/timing of oxygen supply
 - Food/microorganism ratio (F/M)
 - Temperature and pH
 - Sludge return ratios and wasting (sludge age)
- AWTs experience constant variations in the above factors and can rarely be left as installed

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Design/Process Controls

- Require a constant and reliable power source
- The air supply and sludge return systems require regular monitoring and adjustment to ensure optimal system performance
- Air-lift transfer at controlled rates is a more common feature of STS, but requires greater air supply
- Higher rate sludge return may be used to “dilute” influent

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Nutrient Removal

- Two baffled aeration chambers allow managed oxygen control for nitrification and denitrification
- Few STS have defined nutrient reduction levels
- AS1546.3 2017 requires TN<15mg/L, TP<2mg/L
- Certification may state % nutrient reduction (e.g. FujiClean ACE 1200: 79.0% reduction in TN and 14.5% reduction in TP), but removal depends on nutrient concentrations in influent
- Generally no P reduction other than by sedimentation

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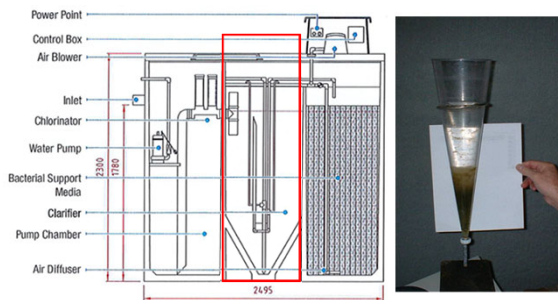
Clarification

- Provides settling of solids from aerobically treated effluent in quiescent conditions
- May utilise a funnel (Imhoff) design to concentrate settled sludge and minimise re-suspension
- In smaller systems, waste activated sludge (WAS) is typically returned to inlet tee of the Primary chamber by the sludge return
- Skimmer may remove floatable flocs and debris (sometimes to the aeration chamber to assist with denitrification)

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Clarification



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Clarification

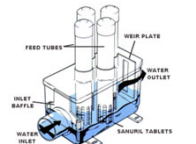
- Eventually some sludge will need to be removed from the aeration chamber by pumpout
- High F/M ratio - more food than microbes - will result in poorer BOD reduction and poorer final effluent quality
- However, some additional food (carbonaceous source) is needed in the aeration chamber to assist with denitrification and this may be supplied by sludge return

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Disinfection

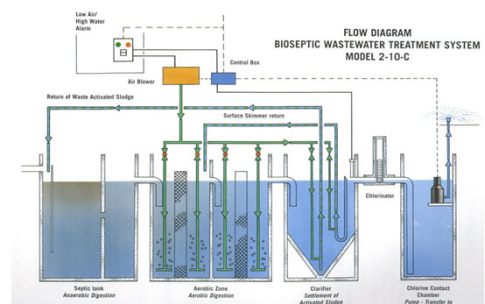
- Requires highly clarified effluent
- Disinfection by either:
 - Chlorination (now used in all STS), (requires turbidity <5 NTU), or
 - Ultraviolet radiation (requires turbidity <1 NTU)



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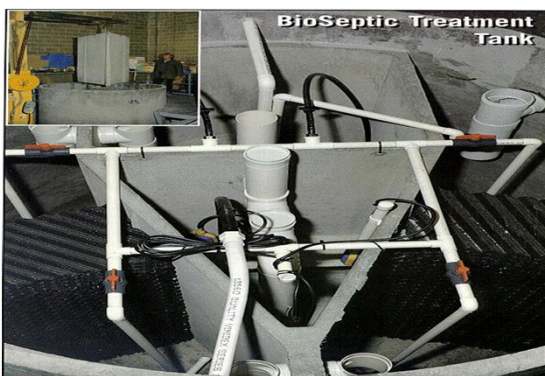


AWTS System Configuration



Source: BioSeptic Pty Ltd

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Source: BioSeptic Pty Ltd

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Suspended Growth Processes Activated Sludge Systems

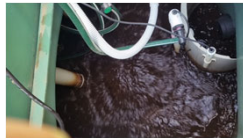
- Activated Sludge is the principal aerobic suspended growth process in AWTS
- Blends raw or Primary treated wastewater with a retained population of microbes in suspension in an aerobic reactor (Mixed Liquor)
- Microbes consume or convert organic material as part of their metabolic processes
- Process requires a dissolved oxygen (DO) concentration >2mg/L

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Suspended Growth Processes

- Treated mixture requires clarification to remove flocculent microorganisms from the waste stream
- A proportion is returned to the aerobic reactor (Return Activated Sludge)
- Various adaptations to the basic process address issues such as:
 - Nutrient removal
 - Small flows
 - Intermittent or low-strength flows
 - Operational simplicity



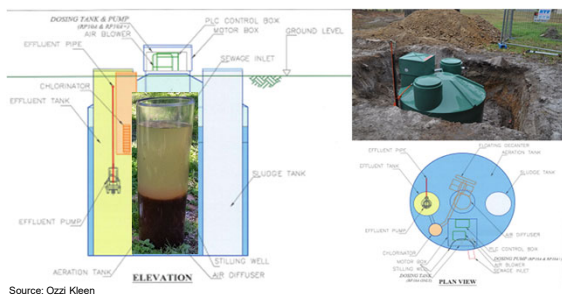
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Suspended Growth Processes

- Process performance can be limited by various environmental and chemical factors:
 - Temperature – cold (slow), warm (fast) metabolism
 - pH – 6.0-9.0, prefer limited variation (6.5-7.5)
 - Available oxygen (DO) – 2mg/L to 3mg/L + mixing
 - Alkalinity – for nitrification (min 50-100mg/L as CaCO₃)
 - Essential nutrients – CNP ratio (100:10:1)
 - Inhibiting substances
- Above are rarely managed in domestic AWTS

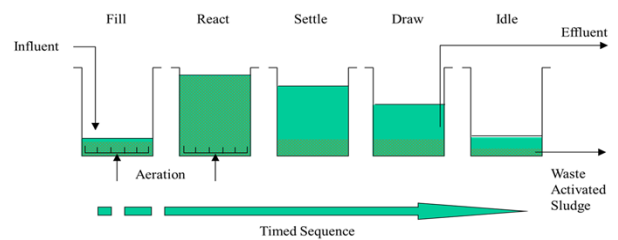
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Activated Sludge System



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Sequencing Batch Reactor



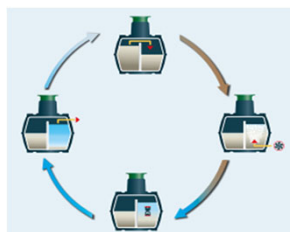
- In a Sequencing Batch Reactor (SBR) a proportion of activated sludge is retained in the tank after decanting

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Sequencing Batch Reactor



Source: Graf



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AWTS Treatment Summary

- Treatment efficiency is highly dependent on even and constant hydraulic and organic loads
- Domestic wastewater is highly variable in quantity and quality (short and long term)
- AWTS are sensitive to biocides (e.g. bleaches, disinfectants, antibiotics)
- AWTS can remove up to 90% BOD₅ and TSS, but less effective at thermotolerant coliform removal
- AWTS do not significantly reduce N or P without careful management and design modifications

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Performance Objectives

(90th percentile)

- Biochemical oxygen demand (BOD₅)
≤20mg/L
- Total suspended solids (TSS)
≤30mg/L
- Chlorination (if applied)
 - Thermotolerant bacteria - median ≤10 cfu/100 mL
 - Total chlorine 0.5 – 2.0mg/L

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References

- Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand (2008) AS/NZS1546.3:2008 On-site domestic wastewater treatment units. Part 3: Aerated wastewater treatment systems
- Standards Australia (2017) AS1546.3:2017 On-site domestic wastewater treatment units. Part 3: Secondary treatment systems

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