

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES — CONVENTIONAL SYSTEMS

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The design, installation, and operation of On-Site Sewage Management (OSSM) Systems are regulated under Local Government Act 1993.

Council's role is to monitor OSSM systems within our Local Government Area to make sure they meet performance standards in accordance with Local Government (General) Regulation and do not pose a threat to human or environmental health.

This is done through assessment and determination from Council before an OSSM system can be installed, constructed, altered or operated. This includes treatment devices, storage tanks and disposal areas.

Ongoing operational approvals are also issued by Council to make sure OSSM systems are managed correctly and owners know their responsibilities.

Inspections are also undertaken by Council officers to ensure operation and maintenance of OSSM systems is undertaken in accordance with relevant approvals.

In most cases, Council will contact owners in writing advise of upcoming inspections or action required to rectify issues with their OSSM.

Council is also responsible for maintaining a register to record details of OSSM systems, and provide education and advice as required.

THE ROLE OF NSW HEALTH

NSW Health provides accreditation for human waste treatment devices or human waste storage facilities that are intended to receive domestic wastewater or human waste.

Accreditation is mandatory for commercially manufactured units and standard designs. The accreditation provides a centralised assessment and testing procedure.

A certificate of accreditation may include specific requirements for the installation, operation, and maintenance of the tested system. Such conditions become conditions of Council approval.

Operators of OSSM systems must understand the accreditation requirements in order to operate their OSSM systems satisfactorily.

Further information about OSSM and accreditation can be sourced from NSW Department of Health.

THE ROLE OF OWNERS

Property owners are responsible for ensuring that their OSSM system is accredited, properly designed, correctly installed, and safely managed.

Owners must also make sure their system does not pollute groundwater or surface waters and does not create risks to public health and safety or the environment.

Householders must take an active role in the ongoing management of their system. This includes regular monitoring, supervision, and maintenance to ensure effective operation.

As an OSSM system owner, you must ensure that:

- Your system is safe, structurally sound, and well maintained.
- Your system has a current Council approval (licence) for operation, and that you comply with all conditions of that approval.
- Your septic tank does not leak and remains structurally sound.
- Sludge levels within your septic tank are monitored, and an approved provider is engaged to pump out (de-sludge) the tank when required.
- Household practices support system health (e.g. using low-phosphorus detergents, limiting harsh chemical use, avoiding shock loading and conserving water).
- Any problems are fixed immediately. If defects cannot be corrected through proper operation and maintenance, the system may need to be replaced.

SIGNS YOUR OSSM MAY BE FAILING

A failing OSSM system can create risks to public health, the environment, and your family. Common warning signs include:

- Wastewater pooling on ground surface. Wastewater is often dark or black in colour, and has a strong odour.
- Soft, damp, and boggy areas appearing near or on top of the trench or bed.
- Household drains emptying slowly or make a “gurgling noise”.
- Wastewater backing up in the house or yard gullies.
- Noticeable odours near the disposal area or tank.

If you notice any of these signs, contact a service provider immediately to assess and repair your system. Repairs may need approval from Council.

DISPOSAL AREAS

If an OSSM system and its disposal area are not properly maintained, the system can fail. Disposal trenches and beds generally have a lifespan of 15–25 years. However, this can be significantly shorter if they are not correctly designed, installed, or maintained.

To protect your disposal area, you must ensure that:

- The disposal area is installed in line with **Australian Standards** and complies with any conditions of approval issued by Council.
- The area is functioning effectively, with the soil safely absorbing nutrients and organic matter.
- No untreated effluent is discharged onto the ground surface or allowed to run off into waterways or neighbouring properties.
- The disposal area is large enough to manage the volume of wastewater generated on your property.
- Livestock, heavy vehicle movements and overland flow is kept away from the disposal area.
- Trees with large or invasive root systems are planted well away from trenches and beds.

SALE OF THE PREMISES

It is the responsibility of the owner of the premises to ensure that new owners or tenants receive relevant information regarding the OSSM including location, sizing and relevant Council approvals.

