

BE MINDFUL OF HAZARDS

- Never enter a treatment system as it may release poisonous gasses that can kill in minutes.
- Other hazards that may be associated with your tank include:
 - The presence of contaminated material around the tank itself.
 - Old systems or pipe work may be unstable and in danger of collapse.
 - Trip hazards.

RECOGNISING PROBLEMS

- Your septic tank or other DWWTS may not be working properly if:
 - Toilets, baths, or sinks are draining slowly.
 - There are foul smells or pools of partially treated effluent sitting on the ground near the system.
 - There are signs of pollution in nearby ditches or watercourses.
 - Although your septic tank may seem to operate fine without any maintenance, it may still be causing problems, e.g., it may be leaking into groundwater.

FURTHER INFO

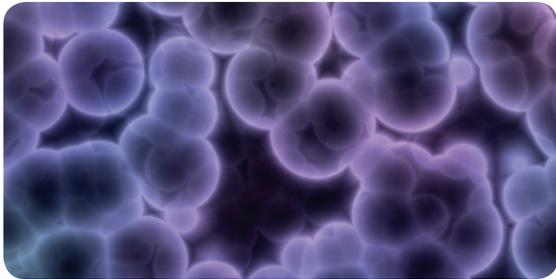
- Your septic tank or other DWWTS may be selected for inspection by your local authority. You can find out more information about this from the leaflet entitled "What to Expect from a Septic Tank Inspection" (available from your local authority or www.protectourwater.ie).
- For information on how to ensure your drinking water is safe, see the leaflet entitled "Is Your Well at Risk from Your Septic Tank" (available from your local authority or www.protectourwater.ie).
- Always ensure if having works carried out to your system as a result of an inspection or otherwise that a reputable and competent contractor is used.
- If you are concerned that your well may be contaminated or vulnerable, you should get it tested. For advice on getting your well water tested contact your local authority or HSE Environmental Health Officer.
- For more information about any of the issues in these leaflets contact your local authority or www.epa.ie.



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR SEPTIC TANK

INTRODUCTION

- About one-third of all houses (500,000) in Ireland rely on a domestic wastewater treatment system (DWWTS) to collect, treat and discharge their wastewater. Septic tanks are one type of DWWTS.
- When not designed or operated properly, DWWTSs are in danger of contaminating our domestic wells or water sources.
- Contaminated water from DWWTSs can carry pathogens (bacteria/germs/bugs) and harmful chemicals that can cause serious illness and damage to the environment.
- Ponding of wastewater and contamination of soil around septic tanks can pose public health risks.



GETTING TO KNOW YOUR SEPTIC TANK

LOCATING YOUR SEPTIC TANK

- DWWTSs are typically located on or adjacent to the property and include systems like septic tanks, packaged plants, tertiary treatment units and associated discharge or infiltration areas.
- To locate your septic tank, search for plans you may have relating to your property. Your local authority may have a copy of these plans.
- Locate the wastewater outlet pipe exiting your house.
- Examine the area around the house to try and judge the location of the tank and percolation area. There may be manholes on the inlet side of the septic tank system, indicating the system's direction and location.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR SEPTIC TANK

- Other ways of locating your DWWTS include using a flushable transmitter, a metal detector, a plumbing cleanout snake or a pipe camera.
- If your home has had lots of repairs or renovations/extension the septic tank may be hard to find. In some cases the system may be located under a patio, deck, porch, driveway or shed even though ideally, it should not be covered over.

HOW YOUR SEPTIC TANK WORKS

- Septic tanks and other DWWTSs accept wastewater from toilets, showers, sinks, washing machines and dishwashers.
- Wastewater flows from the house to the first chamber of the tank. Heavier solids settle to the bottom, and lighter solids such as grease and paper float to the top, forming a layer of scum.
- Effluent flows from the first chamber to the second, where it separates again.
- Partially treated effluent flows into the percolation area where it is distributed through a network of pipes.
- The effluent then filters through gravel and soil to remove bacteria before it enters groundwater.
- The leftover solids and scum form a sludge that needs to be removed regularly from the tank.



YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

REGISTRATION

- Owners of DWWTSs are required by law to register their systems. This applies to all DWWTSs, not just septic tanks. Registration forms are available from your local authority, public libraries, citizens information centres, or register online at www.protectourwater.ie.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

- It is your responsibility as homeowner to ensure that your wastewater system is properly designed, constructed, installed and maintained.
- Exclude grease, excessive bleach or chemicals, food, disposable items (e.g. nappies), and rainwater from your system.
- Have the system serviced and pumped out regularly. Contact your local authority for a list of permitted contractors.
- Ensure all manhole covers are secure.
- Keep all records of service work or de-sludging.

