

## On-site Sewage Management Legislation

Properties where connection to town sewer is not available rely on on-site sewage management systems (OSMS) to treat and dispose of effluent on-site.

On-site sewage management involves the treatment of household wastewater followed by the release of treated effluent into the environment through disposal trenches or irrigation areas. Common OSMS are septic tanks and disposal trenches, Aerated Wastewater Treatment Systems (AWTS), wet composting or worm farm systems and sandfilter or reedbed systems combined with irrigation areas.

A failing OSMS, or inappropriate use of OSMS, can have adverse impacts such as:

- The spread of disease by bacteria, viruses, parasites and other organisms found in effluent.
- Contamination of ground and surface water.
- Degradation of soil and vegetation.
- Decreased community amenity, caused by odours, insects and vermin.

Reforms for the management of on-site sewage management systems were introduced by the NSW Government in 1998, following the Wallis Lake Hepatitis outbreak in 1997. The Hepatitis outbreak resulted in one death and over 400 people being infected by the virus. The outbreak was directly linked to sewage effluent contamination of the lake from failing OSMS.

The successful implementation of On-site Sewage Management reforms has contributed to environmental improvements and a reduction in public health risks to owners of OSMS and also to the community as a whole.

Under the Local Government Act 1993, owners are required to obtain Council approval for the operation of an OSMS and must comply with conditions of approval. In order to control and regulate OSMS, Council introduced and implemented DCP32, On-site Sewage Management Strategy, which sets performance standards and related maintenance and reporting requirements.



*Failing septic systems have a detrimental effect on sensitive aquatic ecosystems within the Macleay catchment area.*



Council's On-site Sewage Management Strategy was adopted in 1999 and a subsequent inspection program was introduced, with the implementation being partly funded by registration and inspection fees.

## Changes to On-site Sewage Management Program

The changes to the OSM program have been influenced by factors such as:

- The need to develop of an improved inspection program with optimal environmental and health outcomes for all residents within the Shire.
- The need for the cost of running the OSM program to be spread equitably across all owners of OSMS within the Shire.

Under the new program an annual fee of \$50 for a single dwelling (or multiples of \$50 per system), \$60 for small commercial systems and \$120 for large commercial systems, will be collected from each property with an OSMS (as adopted in Councils fees and charges 2010/2011). For some operators of high risk OSMS, this will not result in an increase in fee previously charged. The fee will be listed as a separate item in the invoice section of the annual rates notice.

On collection of the fee an annual approval to operate an OSMS will be generated and issued. The approval will be issued with a detailed list of conditions that are required to be met by the owner of the system and will be specifically related to the type of OSMS on the property. The onus then falls to the owner of the system to ensure that the conditions of the approval are met. A risk-based inspection program will continue to be carried out to monitor compliance of existing OSMS within the Shire. The annual charge will cover an initial inspection during the monitoring program.

If the OSMS has non-compliance issues and works are required, the system will be re-inspected after the time frame for works to be completed expires. If works are still required to be carried out then a \$100 re-inspection fee will be charged.

NOTE: OSMS that have a current approval to operate will not be charged the annual fee until the current approval has expired.

## Benefits of the New OSM Program

- All areas of the Shire, including remote areas, will be inspected and any possible threats to the environment and / or public health (associated with failing OSMS) rectified.
- The new program will enable Council to develop a more widespread and thorough inspection regime (including remote areas of the Shire).
- Council officers can focus on high risk and repeat non-compliance systems, where OSMS may be posing a threat to the environment and/or public health. This will result in greater environmental and health outcomes that will benefit the whole community.
- Under the proposed OSM program, the cost of the monitoring program will be spread equitably across all users, based on potential risks to the environment.
- Once all OSMS approvals expire and all owners of systems are paying the annual fee, funding will be used for further improvements, such as expanding water quality monitoring programs, a comprehensive review of Council's On-site Sewage Management Strategy Development Control Plan, OSM Risk Mapping of the Shire, OSM land capability mapping for rural/residential land release strategies and public education.

**For further information and advice on the new  
OSM Program or  
your Septic System  
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