SEPTIC TANK AND SEPTIC SYSTEM MAINTENANCE

It pays to take care of septic tanks in your community. When not maintained properly the bacteria necessary to process the material entering can be destroyed causing the biological process to shut down. Then sludge builds up and is pushed into the drain field where it clogs up the system. This may lead to backflow and offensive odours emitting from the system.

To help communities maintain their septic system and/or waste treatment plant the following advice is provided:

Send all sewage into the septic. Don’t run laundry or bathroom waste into the drain field, as soap or detergent scum will plug the soil causing the leaching of treated liquid into the soil.

Use cleaners labelled as biodegradable or septic safe. Follow directions for use and use in moderation. Use alternative cleaners such as bicarbonate of soda, pure soap, borax or vinegar.

Don’t deposit cooking fats, coffee grounds, wet-strength towels (ie chux type) disposable diapers, sanitary products, facial tissue, cigarette butts and other non-decomposable materials into your septic. These type of materials don’t decompose and will build up to block the system.

Don’t deposit grease down the drain. It will build up and block the system. Collect and recycle where possible.

Use toilet paper that will break up easily. One way to check is to put a handful in a half jar of water and shake. If the tissue breaks up the product is suitable for your septic.

Using too much soap or detergents can cause problems with your septic. If there are lots of suds in the discharge water from your washing machine cut back on the powder. Liquid laundry detergents are better than powder.

Minimise the work for your septic. Repair leaking household taps and toilet cisterns. The most effective way to minimise toilet discharge is by installing water saving cisterns and pedestals.

Never release chemical drain cleaners, solvents such as paint, motor oil, pesticides, bleaching agents poisons or chemicals into drains.

For correct functioning septic tanks need to operate under alkaline conditions or the result is strong odours caused by bacteria dying off under acidic conditions. It can be quite simple to restore bacteria using hydrated lime available from hardware stores.

Mix 0.5kg of lime with 10 litres of water.
Flush the mixture down the toilet 2 or 3 times a day for 3 to 4 days until a total of about 5kg of lime is used.
If the odours persist repeat after 7 days.

Tanks need to be pumped out. At least once every four years for domestic units. More often depending on size for commercial units.