



We are here to help.

Below are the rules for both existing and new septic tank discharges in England. If you require further information please feel free to contact us via our website. <http://pjcgroundworks.co.uk>, by phone 01704 823362 or 24hr mobile 07843381845

THE RULES

[Septic tanks](#) settle the solids in the sewage and then discharge the liquid septic effluent to ground via a correctly designed and constructed [drainage field](#) - NOT a soakaway pit, soakaway crates, tunnels or Ezy Drain. These are not allowed for sewage effluent dispersal.

They cannot discharge into ditches, streams, canals, rivers, surface water drains or any other type of watercourse. Under the new Environment Agency [General Binding Rules](#), If you have a septic tank that discharges directly to a surface water (ditch, stream, river, etc.) **you must replace or upgrade your septic tank treatment system to a full sewage treatment plant by 1 January 2020, or when you sell your property, if it is before this date.**

ALL septic tanks that currently ultimately discharge into watercourses will have to be either:

- Replaced, using a [sewage treatment plant](#) with full BS EN 12566-3 Certification instead, or
- The discharge to the watercourse stopped and diverted to a drainfield, designed and constructed to the current British Standard BS6297 2007

Explanation of terms

A [septic tank](#) is an underground settlement tank where the solids sink to the bottom, forming a sludge, floating solids and dead bacteria float to the top, forming a crust and the septic liquid flows out to a drainage field.

A [drainage field](#), also known as an infiltration system, is a series of rigid pipes with holes or slots, placed in trenches, over drainage stone and arranged in a closed loop design so that the effluent can trickle through the ground for further treatment by soil bacteria.

You cannot use a soakaway (designed for draining rainwater), well or borehole for discharging effluent to ground. If your system includes a [soakaway](#), you must either change it to a drainage field or apply for a permit from the Environment Agency, so that they can assess the risk to groundwater at your site and the risk to groundwater in general.

Your septic tank must meet the new, higher standards

Your septic tank must meet the relevant British Standard in force at the time of installation. The new standards for septic tank systems are:

- BS EN 12566-1 for septic tanks. You cannot install a new septic tank that does not have this Certification.
- BS 6297:2007 for [drainage](#) fields. No other method of effluent disposal is allowed.

Your septic tank must meet the British Standard in place at the time of installation if:

- It is CE marked
- The documentation that came with your tank has a British Standard Certificate of compliance
- Your septic tank is on the British Water's list of approved equipment for BS EN 12566-1

If your septic tank was installed before 1983, then this was before any British Standards were in place. Your tank does not have to meet the above standards.

Your septic tank must be the correct size and be installed correctly

Your septic tank must be large enough for the purpose. If you install a new septic tank or drainage field you must insist that the installer makes sure that it is the right size. See British Water's Flows and Loads 4 guidance.

If you increase the volume of sewage the septic tank receives (an extension or connection to another sewage source) then the septic tank system is unlikely to be big enough. The new volumes must be recalculated to establish the maximum daily volume of discharge. You must then either replace the septic tank and drainfield with a larger system, or install a sewage treatment plant instead. You also must apply for a permit from the Environment Agency if the new system discharges more than 2 cubic metres (2,000 litres, or 13 persons) a day into the ground. Septic tanks will not normally be allowed for more than 15 persons under the EPP2 regulations.

Your septic tank must be installed in accordance with the manufacturer's [Installation Specifications](#) and the drainage field must be designed in accordance with BS6297:2007

Your septic tank must be regularly emptied and maintained

You must remove the settled sludge in the septic tank before it exceeds the maximum capacity and interferes with the tank's ability to settle solids. This will mean that you should have your septic tank emptied once a year or in line with the manufacturer's instructions if it is a very large tank.

The tanker company that you use for the emptying must be a registered waste carrier. Ask them, or the tanker driver for a copy of the company's waste carrier certificate as it is your responsibility.

You must have your septic tank repaired or replaced if it has any of the faults below::

- Cracked pipes, walls, faulty mortar joints, missing dip pipes, etc.
- Leaks through pipes or walls
- Blocked pipes, either going to, in or after the tank
- Drainage field problems - the septic tank and manholes 'backing-up', soggy areas of ground near the drainage field, pooling water around the tank or soakaway.
- Smells from the tank or drainage area

When you sell your property

You must tell the new owner, in writing that they are responsible for a septic tank discharge

This must include:

- A full description of the septic tank and drainage field
- The location of the septic tank and drainage field
- Details of any changes made to the septic tank or drainage field from the original design
- Details of the maintenance required for the septic tank
- Records of maintenance that you have had done to the system. You must keep these for 7 years.

If you stop using the septic tank system

When you stop using a septic tank, all sludge must be removed to prevent any pollution possibilities. This only applies if the septic tank is permanently abandoned, not for holiday absences, empty between tenants, etc.

It should also be filled in with rubble, stone, sand or any other undegradeable material.

Special rules for septic tank discharges in a groundwater source protection zone 1 (SPZ1)

A groundwater SPZ1 is:

- The area around a commercial water supply (used for drinking water or food production) shown on the Groundwater Source Protection Zones Map - check if your discharge is in a SPZ1
- An area within 50 metres of a private water supply - well, borehole or spring - used for human consumption or bathing. This may be on a nearby property, so ask all neighbours.

You must apply for a PERMIT from the Environment Agency, if you have an existing discharge or are proposing a new discharge to ground in an SPZ1. The permit application fee is £125, but may well be refused. If granted, more conditions to the general binding rules will be added.

The Environment Agency will not grant the permit if there is:

- Any evidence of pollution
- The pollution risk is too great

If either of the above are in evidence, the Environment Agency issue an improvement notice and may issue a permit with these conditions met.

The Environment Agency regularly checks:

- Surface and groundwater quality for signs of pollution from septic tank effluent
- That your septic system complies with the permit conditions.

Any pollution to surface or groundwater is a serious offence. The E.A. will contact you and may review or revoke your permit. See complying with your permit.

See how to apply for an E.A. permit. Contact the Environment Agency if you need help with your application.

New discharges from septic tanks installed and in use on or after 1 January 2015 - Additional Rules

These additional rules apply if your:

- New discharge from a septic tank started on or after 1 January 2015
- Discharge to ground started before 1 January 2015 and you want to install a new drainage field more than 10 metres away from the existing one

Check if there is a local public sewer

You cannot install a new drainage field if any part of the building your septic tank system serves is within 30 metres of a public sewer. Instead, you must connect to the public sewer, as the Environment Agency will not allow you to start a new discharge from a septic tank under the general binding rules, if it is possible to connect to mains sewerage..

If the site contains more than one house, then this distance is increased in a linear manner, eg if there are 5 properties then the distance to the sewer will be 5 x 30 metres = 150 metres.

Your local water authority will be able to tell you where the nearest sewer access point is.

Sometimes, it is impossible to connect to the sewer, even if it is close-by. This may be because there is a railway line in the way, or the sewer is already full to capacity, etc In these instances, you must apply for a permit so that the Environment Agency can decide on the best way forward.

Planning permission and Building regulations

You must have planning permission and Building regulations approval for all septic tank installations.

Discharge points in or near designated sensitive areas

There are several special areas that make the installation of a septic tank more complicated.

You will need a permit if the new discharge will be in or within 50 metres of any:

- Special conservation areas
- Special protection areas
- Ramsar sites
- Biological sites of special scientific interest

Also, if the development is within Ancient Woodland, you will need a Permit.

Contact the Environment Agency to check for the above areas..

Rules for Scotland

In Scotland, you must REGISTER a sewage discharge, both new and existing, with SEPA. If it is an existing discharge that has been in use since 1st. April 2006, then you can register it if it is for 15 persons or less. If was in use BEFORE this date, then you can register it if it is for 50 persons or less. For populations higher than these, on the dates above, the you need to apply for a LICENCE from SEPA.

For the full list of rules, see <https://www.sepa.org.uk/regulations/water/small-scale-sewage-discharges/>

Rules For Wales

You must REGISTER your septic tank or package sewage treatment plant with Natural Resources Wales. It is a legal requirement.

For small scale discharges, it is normally free, subject to circumstance.:

- If your septic tank or sewage treatment plant discharges into a drainfield in the ground and the domestic property or properties have up to 13 people.
- If your package sewage treatment plant discharges to a watercourse, and the domestic property or proprietries house less than 33 people.

- If the sewage system is not near a protected environment, or the groundwater under your land, flows to a water abstraction point that is used for human consumption.
- For examples of the above, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or a Source Protection Zone for drinking water. Natural Resources Wales will check this when they receive your application.

Please see <https://naturalresources.wales>

You require a Consent to Discharge for any septic tank or sewage treatment plant effluent being discharged to the ground via a drainfield and for any sewage treatment plant discharging to a watercourse.

All sewage treatment plants **MUST** be capable of achieving a 95% reduction of BOD and usually, 97.5% reduction if they discharge to small streams where the flow rate is lower. Only our Vortex sewage treatment plant is capable of this level of purity.

Feel free to contact Phil our 'Rules and regulations' specialist on 07843381845 if you require any further clarification.