

Maintenance advice for your septic tank, domestic treatment plant or cesspool

- It is extremely important that surface water or roof water does not run into septic tanks as this reduces the tanks capacity and can cause solids to be flushed out of the tank. This may also breach your Water Order Discharge Consent and will impair the operation of the soakaway.
- A check on the nature of the effluent draining from a septic tank can indicate whether it needs emptying. Normally, the effluent will be light grey in colour. However, as the sludge content of the tank increases, the effluent will increasingly contain dark solids. You have an obligation to desludge at least once a year as per your Water Order Discharge Consent.
- When a septic tank is desludged a quantity of sludge, usually around 10%, is left to continue the biological process, this helps improve the effluent quality. Septic tanks usually fill within several days of desludging, depending on the number of occupants, number of bathrooms and kitchen appliances discharging into the tank.
- Domestic treatment plants using moving parts or compressed air usually require power isolation before desludging can take place. Manufacturers can advise on individual requirements and maximum allowable periods without power to assist in the desludging of such units.
- Cesspools are tanks which simply collect foul waste from properties and provide no treatment. When full, they require emptying as there is no outlet or sub surface drainage permissible. These types of tanks are usually installed as a temporary arrangement pending connection to a sewer or package plant.

Help us to help you – a few handy hints

- Save water. It allows your tank to work efficiently
- Learn the location of your tank
- Make a map and keep it handy
- Keep your septic tank documents in a safe place
- Clearly identify the tank to be desludged with a marker
- Display a house number so that we can find you
- Ensure your tank has a secure cover
- Keep covers and vents clear and free of debris
- Ensure safe access to your tank is available
- Desludge annually

Further Information: Good Practice

Regardless of when your septic tank was constructed or installed, you require a Discharge Consent under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. This consent must be obtained from the Water Management Unit of Environment and Heritage Service (EHS), an executive agency within DOE. A discharge consent is an important legal document which you will be required to produce if you are selling your property.

A consent states the conditions under which permission is granted to discharge from a septic tank to underground via a sub-surface irrigation system, or to a waterway. One of the conditions of a discharge consent is that a septic tank must be desludged at least once every 12 months; this is also good practice to ensure the effective operation of the system. Further guidance on septic tanks, domestic treatment plants and cesspools can be obtained by referring to your tank manufacturer or by reference to Pollution Prevention Guidelines (PPG4) issued by EHS:

<http://www.ehsni.gov.uk/index/publications.htm>

If you need to request a discharge consent application form, or a copy of PPG4 contact EHS at:

EHS Water Management Unit
17 Antrim Road
Lisburn
Co Antrim
BT28 3AL

email: EP@doeni.gov.uk

Phone: 028 9262 3126 or 028 9263 3489

Northern Ireland Water
PO Box 1023
Belfast
BT1 9DG

website: www.niwater.com
Waterline: 0845 744 0088

Septic Tank, Domestic Treatment Plant and Cesspool Services



Northern Ireland Water offers a range of discretionary desludging services to customers who have septic tanks, treatment plants and cesspools which receive domestic waste

A septic tank is a two or three chamber structure, which retains sewage from a property for sufficient time to allow solids to form into sludge at the base of the tank, where it is partially broken down by bacteria. The remaining liquid in the tank then drains from the tank by means of an outlet pipe and soakaway.

Domestic treatment plants are usually specialist GRP (glass reinforced plastic) units purchased to treat sewage to a higher standard than that achievable by a septic tank alone. These units usually have moving parts or need compressed air and as such need electrical connections. These units, like septic tanks, also discharge through an outlet pipe and soakaway.

A cesspool is a sealed tank connected to a property by a series of drains. It collects the sewage from a property and when it is full it has to be emptied and the waste water taken away by tanker to a proper disposal point. Cesspools do not have an outlet pipe or drain.

Service Conditions for a Standard Tank Desludge

If our contractor needs to drive a tanker onto your property the access needs to be at least 3.5m wide along the route and clear of obstruction and of a gradient not steeper than 1:15.

Our contractors' vehicle will require, an all-weather area that can support the weight of an 18 tonne tanker within 30m of the tank.

The all-weather area should not be more than 1.2m above the cover level of the septic tank.

Before emptying a tank, we need unobstructed access between the septic tank and the all-weather area where the tanker will park.

We require safe working conditions around the tank.

The septic tank must only receive domestic sewage.

The cover/s must be capable of being removed safely by one person.

The tank must be able to be desludged without entering another persons land (written consent is needed otherwise).

If the tank has an electrical supply you must be present to isolate the power prior to desludging.

Northern Ireland Water reserves the right to refuse the desludging of a septic tank, cesspool or domestic treatment plant if our service conditions are not met.

If you cannot fulfil our conditions or are in any doubt, we may be able to offer you a service using different/additional equipment. If lids are not readily accessible, free from any apparent damage or are seized/locked in position we will not be liable for any damage caused, unless negligence is proven. The maintenance of tanks and connecting pipe work is the responsibility of the householder. Northern Ireland Water is not responsible for clearing blockages in connecting pipework.

We offer two different types of service to customers not connected to mains sewers, one of which should suit your needs

Option 1 Standard septic tank desludge. Includes removal and treatment of up to 4.5m³ or 990 gallons of sludge within twelve working days.

Option 2 Domestic treatment plant desludge. Includes removal and treatment of up to 4.5m³ or 990 gallons of sludge within twelve working days.

Customers can request one free discretionary empty in any given twelve month period providing our service conditions can be met. Should you require a second empty in the twelve months this will be charged and can be checked by telephoning Waterline or checking our scheme of charges on our website.

To request a desludge service please telephone our Waterline number 0845 744 0088 or write to the address overleaf.

Please record here the date you last requested your septic tank to be emptied:
