


SEPTIC TANKS

IMPORTANT CHANGES TO THE CONTROL OF SMALL PRIVATE SEWAGE DISCHARGES



What do we mean by a small private sewage discharge?

When houses are not served by a public sewerage system, the sewage and waste water from a house is treated by a septic tank or other form of treatment system. This system then discharges effluent to a soakaway. Where the soil conditions are not suitable for a soakaway then the discharge from the septic tank (or equivalent) may be to surface water, for example to a burn, river, loch, or to the sea.

What's new?

From 1 April 2006, there have been significant changes to the control of sewage discharges following the introduction of the Controlled Activity Regulations 2005 (or CAR). Under these regulations, all new sewage discharges from domestic properties serving less than or equal to a population equivalent of 15 (one house of three or less bedrooms is taken to be five population equivalent) will require to be authorised by registering with SEPA. This includes all sewage discharges to soakaway. For population equivalents of greater than 15, please contact your local SEPA office as a licence will be required.

What were the old requirements?

Under the Control of Pollution Act 1974 (or CoPA) all sewage discharges to surface waters required a consent from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA). In most cases there was no requirement for a consent from SEPA for sewage discharges to soakaway.



I have an existing sewage discharge – what do I need to do?

If you already hold a CoPA consent for your small sewage discharge, you don't need to do anything – all consents for sewage discharges have been transferred into the new control regime automatically. If you do not know whether the discharge is authorised or not, you can check with your local SEPA office.


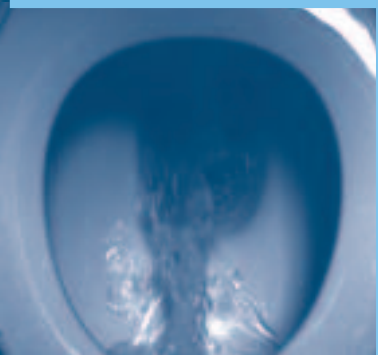
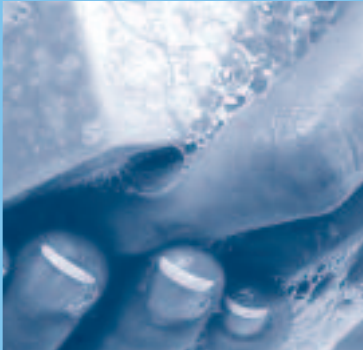

If you do not hold a consent for your sewage discharge, you should register with SEPA. SEPA expects that this will normally happen via the house sale process, when the buying agent will require that all appropriate authorisations associated with the house are provided with the house before sale.


Please note that for existing discharges (those existing before 1 April 2006) the upper population equivalent limit for registration is 50.

It is important to note that registration of existing sewage discharges does not protect the householder from enforcement action if the discharge causes pollution. The owner may be subject to enforcement action by SEPA, whether a registration is in place or not.

Existing untreated discharges

Some existing small private sewage discharges are untreated, which means that the sewage does not pass through a septic tank or any other form of treatment before discharge to the environment. These untreated discharges are usually to coastal waters. SEPA intends to phase out these untreated discharges. If you apply to register an untreated discharge you are likely to be subject to conditions requiring treatment within a specified timescale.





I intend to build a house with a private sewage discharge – what should I do?

Initially, you should seek connection to the public sewer. Where this is not available, the following should be considered:

1. Sewage discharge to soakaway: if ground conditions permit, the sewage should be discharged to soakaway. In this case, your local authority building standards department enforces the design standards required for septic tanks and soakaways. The system must therefore be approved by the building standards department and will consequently have a building standards reference number. The sewage discharge can be registered with SEPA as long as the ground conditions are suitable and a building standards reference number is provided. This indicates to SEPA that the applicant has undergone the proper process for ensuring the correct design of the sewage disposal system.

2. Sewage discharging to burn, river, loch, estuary or coast: SEPA discourages sewage discharges to rivers, lochs, estuaries or coasts. However, where ground conditions are not suitable for soakaways, SEPA may consider approving discharges to surface water if these are environmentally acceptable. SEPA will require the discharge to be registered, as with discharges to soakaway. In these cases, it is essential that the local SEPA office is contacted for advice before applying for a registration to ensure that SEPA requirements are met to prevent pollution incidents. Failure to contact SEPA before submitting an application to register may result in delays in processing your application.

I have planning permission. Do I still need to register with SEPA?

Yes.

How do I register?

Registration forms and charging information are available online at www.sepa.org.uk or from your local SEPA office.

You can also save money by registering online at www.sepa.org.uk/wfdreg.

Will I be notified of the registration?

Yes. SEPA will notify the applicant that the registration has been successful, along with the terms of the registration. SEPA will process the registration within 30 days.

Further information is available at www.sepa.org.uk.

POLLUTION REPORT LINE

0800 80 70 60

24 HRS A DAY-7 DAYS A WEEK

www.sepa.org.uk