

Summary criteria for the registration of small sewage discharges

This summary contains information on the criteria for registering your sewage treatment system as exempt from the need for an environmental permit. This guidance applies to both existing and new discharges.

Background

Some homes are not connected to a public sewer because they are too far away. Instead, they may use a septic tank or package sewage treatment plant to deal with their domestic sewage. The discharge from a septic tank goes into the ground via an infiltration system or drainage field (soakaway). The discharge from a package sewage treatment plant may either go to ground or into surface water such as a river, stream or estuary.

A **septic tank** is a simple tank that is usually buried in the ground; it has an inflow of sewage from the house and an outflow from the tank. The septic tank allows solid matter to settle in the tank and liquids to flow out. The outflow from the septic tank requires further treatment and this is normally achieved by soaking it away into the ground, where bacteria in the soil complete the treatment process. A discharge from a septic tank straight into surface water cannot be registered, and it is unlikely that we would grant an environmental permit for such a discharge.

A **package sewage treatment plant** (often called 'package plants' or 'PTPs') are like mini sewage treatment works and produce much cleaner effluent than septic tanks. For this reason, effluent from package treatment plants can normally be discharged to surface waters such as rivers, streams or estuaries. Package treatment plants are more sophisticated than septic tanks and require a source of power as well as more frequent maintenance.

What is a small sewage discharge?

A small sewage discharge is:

- a discharge of 2 cubic metres per day or less (equivalent to sewage from 9 people living in a single property) to the ground via a septic tank and infiltration system (soakaway);

- a discharge of 5 cubic metres per day or less (equivalent to sewage from 31 people occupying a single property) to a river, stream or estuary via a package sewage treatment plant.

What is an existing discharge?

If the discharge was already being made before 6 April 2010 it is an **existing discharge**. If you have upgraded or replaced your treatment system (or are planning to do so) but still make the discharge to the same place, then this is still an existing discharge.

What is a new discharge?

A **new discharge** is one that was started after the 6 April 2010. If you have upgraded or replaced your existing treatment system (or are planning to do so) and make the discharge to a different place, then this would be classed as a new discharge.

The date 6 April 2010 relates to implementation of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010, known as EPR.

Criteria for registration

In order to register your sewage discharge you will need to fulfil and agree to the following criteria.

For **existing discharges** please go to [Part A Criteria for existing discharges](#)

For **new discharges** please go to [Part B Criteria for new discharges](#)

In order to fully understand your responsibilities please take time to read our full guidance document: [Guidance for the registration of small sewage effluent discharges](#) where the criteria for registration are explained in full. This sets out our legal and technical requirements for the registration of small sewage effluent discharges.

PART A: Summary criteria for registration of existing discharges

All existing discharges to ground and surface water:

- The sewage must only be domestic
- The system must be installed and operated in accordance with the manufacturer's specification. Maintenance must be undertaken by someone who is competent. You must have a maintenance plan. Records (for example, maintenance, tank emptying and servicing receipts) must be kept for 5 years. You should pass any records on to the new occupier if you move house

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- Waste sludge from the system must be safely disposed of by an authorised person
- The discharge must not cause pollution of surface water or groundwater

Additional criteria for existing discharges to surface water:

- The discharge must be 5 cubic metres or less per day in volume
- In tidal waters, the discharge outlet must be below the low water mark
- The sewage must receive treatment from a package sewage treatment plant

Additional criteria for existing discharges to ground via an infiltration system or drainage field:

- The discharge must be 2 cubic metres or less per day in volume
- The discharge must be outside a groundwater Source Protection Zone 1 (we will check this for you) and be further than 50 metres from any well or borehole that is used to supply water (you must ask your neighbours for information on any private abstractions they may have)
- The sewage must receive adequate treatment via a septic tank and infiltration system / drainage field in accordance with the relevant British Standard requirements in force at the time of installation
- There must be no discharge to surface water

PART B: Summary criteria for registration of new discharges

All new discharges to ground and surface water:

- The sewage must only be domestic
- The discharge must not be within 30 metres of a public foul sewer
- The occupier must have obtained any necessary planning and building control approval for the treatment system
- The system must be installed and operated in accordance with the manufacturer's specification. Maintenance must be undertaken by someone who is competent. You must have a maintenance plan. Records (for example, maintenance, tank emptying and servicing receipts) must be kept for 5 years. You should pass any records on to the new occupier if you move house

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- The system should be sized in accordance with British Water Code of Practice - Flows and Loads 3 (your installer will be able to confirm this)
- Waste sludge from the system must be safely disposed of by an authorised person
- The discharge must not cause pollution of surface water or groundwater

Additional criteria for new discharges to surface water:

- The discharge must be 5 cubic metres or less per day in volume
- The discharge must be made to a watercourse that normally contains water throughout the year. The discharge cannot be to an enclosed lake or pond
- The discharge must be more than 50 metres from an identified bathing water or a designated shellfishery (we will check this for you)
- The discharge must be more than 500 metres from a designated European site, Ramsar site, Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or any locally identified protected site or species (we will check this for you)
- In tidal waters, the discharge outlet must be below the low water mark
- The sewage must receive treatment from a package sewage treatment plant. Any partial drainage field must be installed within 10 metres of the bank side of the watercourse

Additional criteria for new discharges to ground via an infiltration system or drainage field:

- The discharge must be 2 cubic metres or less per day in volume
- The discharge must be outside a groundwater Source Protection Zone 1 (we will check this for you) and be further than 50 metres from any well or borehole that is used to supply water (you must ask your neighbours for information on any private abstractions they may have)
- The discharge must be more than 50 metres from a designated European site, Ramsar site, Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or any locally identified protected site or species (we will check this for you)
- The sewage must receive adequate treatment via a septic tank and infiltration system / drainage field in accordance with the relevant British Standard (your installer will be able to confirm this)
- The discharge outlet from the treatment system must be installed in accordance with the relevant British Standard (your installer will be able to confirm this)
- There must be no discharge to surface water

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