

Decommissioning Septic Tanks

When is decommissioning required?

When the premises is connected to new reticulated sewer infrastructure or when an old septic tank is replaced with a new one.

This is to ensure that the tank does not cause any future public health or environmental problems.

Steps involved in decommissioning

1. All effluent and sludge is to be removed from the tank by an approved contractor. The tank, leach drains or soak wells must be completely emptied.
2. After pump out/cleanout, the tank is to be treated with Ag lime or hydrated lime to disinfect the tank. Care should be taken when using lime. It is recommended that appropriate precautionary steps be taken such as using personal protective equipment (skin protection, eye protection and respiratory protection). Only qualified persons should be employed to use chemicals.
3. After treatment with lime, holes for drainage are to be provided to the bottom of the tank. The concrete lids and portion of the tank walls are to be broken to below ground level. Alternatively – the whole tank can be removed.
4. The tank is to be filled with solid, clean fill with the ground surface made good. If settling of the fill material occurs over time it may be necessary to make good with further fill.
5. The following must be provided to Council as evidence that decommissioning took place:
 - a. Receipt from the approved contractor for removal of the effluent and sludge; and
 - b. A statement/letter from a plumber stating that the works were conducted in accordance with these instructions.

What if I have an old derelict house on a rural property? Do I still need to decommission it?

Council recommends you decommission the septic tank to remove any associated risks, however you can choose to keep it in place.

Upon notification, Council will inspect your property to ensure the house is uninhabitable. Your septic

tank will still remain on Council's register and the annual fee levied on the rates will continue to apply until the tank is decommissioned. The tank may still be subject to an inspection by Council on occasion to ensure there are no environmental or public health risks caused by the tank.

It is recommended that you minimise any safety risks posed by the septic tank and ensure it has a solid sealed lid.

Reusing a septic tank

An old septic tank may be reused for storm water storage or an irrigation tank. However the water may only be used for garden purposes. It cannot be used for topping up swimming pools or internal household purposes such as toilet flushing, in laundry tubs, washing machines, bathrooms or kitchens. It must never be used for drinking.

To reuse the tank:

- You must have the effluent and sludge removed.
- The tank treated must be treated with Ag or hydrated lime.
- The sides, lid, baffle or partition and square junctions of the tank should be hosed down as the waste is being removed.
- The tank should be filled with fresh water and disinfected to a minimum level of 5mg/L of free residual chlorine with a half hour contact time. The chlorine should be allowed to dissipate naturally at least overnight and not be neutralised.
- The inlet and outlet of the vessel should be sealed. Pumps and other accessories may then be installed and connected to an irrigation system.
- The tank should be labelled as containing water unfit for human consumption.

More information

Visit Council's website at www.federationcouncil.nsw.gov.au. Alternatively, contact Council on (02) 6033 8999 and ask to speak to the Environmental Health Officer (EHO).