

Odour – Septic Tank

Odour from septic tanks can cause a nuisance to neighbours and interfere with their normal daily activities. If severe enough, it could also affect their health. This fact sheet can help you to reduce odour from septic tanks and meet legal requirements.

Be a good neighbour

Talk to neighbours. Find out what concerns they may have and seek suggestions about solving problems. Solutions can often be found that satisfy everyone.

The law

Queensland's *Environmental Protection Act* includes controls for odour nuisances. Council is legally required to enforce these controls. If issues between neighbours cannot be resolved and further complaints are made, Council will investigate.

If odour is found to be a nuisance, Council may issue a Direction Notice, detailing the offence and giving a timeframe for the problem to be rectified.

Noncompliance with a Direction Notice may result in a fine.

The criteria

When investigating a septic tank odour complaint, Council will consider:

- The amount of odour being emitted
- The duration and rate of emission and the odour's characteristics and qualities
- The sensitivity of the environment into which the odour is being emitted and the impact it has had or may have
- Views of any other neighbours
- Any other relevant criteria

Ways to reduce odour emissions

Good housekeeping

- Regular maintenance will reduce odour emissions. All septs should be maintained annually. Check the depth of the scum and sludge build-up annually. When it occupies two thirds of the tank, it should be pumped out by an approved contractor.
- Avoid putting paints, hazardous chemicals, cigarette butts, pet bath water and sanitary napkins down the drain. These degrade slowly and can affect the system's performance.
- Avoid washing grease, fats and oils down your kitchen sink. Environmentally friendly washing and cleaning products with a low sodium concentration are recommended.
- Ensure that septic trenches and effluent irrigation systems are functioning appropriately and not leeching or ponding effluent over the ground.
- Ensure that septic tank lids and grease traps are sealed and free of cracks.

Observe weather conditions

Odour complaints are more frequent in summer. Observe your yard for seepage as this is the time when the sun can dry an overflow or seepages, and winds can quickly spread the odour.

Heavy rain can enter an improperly covered system, causing sewage overflow. Regular inspection of covers and access ports can reduce this risk.