



General Binding Rules – Explanation and Options

Does your current septic tank discharge to a watercourse?

Are you looking at purchasing a property with a septic tank?

Ask the experts to clarify all the relevant information applying to your property.

As of the 1 January 2015 new rules have come into force, the general binding rules. If your system was installed and discharging before 31 December 2014 you have an 'existing discharge'. If your system was installed and discharging on or after 1 January 2015 you have a 'new discharge'.

Septic tank regulations for both England and Wales have changed. All septic tank or small sewage treatment plant discharges to surface water must comply with the new rules by January 2020.

Some existing systems discharge the effluent from a septic tank to a soakaway / filtration system. Some have an out flow to a watercourse or discharge directly to a watercourse - please see examples below;

Watercourse: The effluent flows indirectly or directly through a pipe into a stream, a river or a ditch. **The new rules do affect the indirect or direct discharge to a watercourse as they state that discharge from a septic tank into a watercourse will no longer be permitted and the system will need to be replaced by a sewage treatment plant**

Soakaway / filtration system: The wastewater is released through a network of pipes in surrounding sub-soils, providing an additional form of treatment for the effluent from the septic tank. This helped ensure that the sewage water being dispersed to ground did not cause pollution. Septic tanks discharging into a soakaway / filtration system (subject to compliance with Part H of Building Regulations) may not be affected by the new septic tank regulations.

Rules for existing and new sewage treatment systems

This section examines how the implementation of these new septic tank regulations will impact upon pre-existing septic tank units as well as new installations.

Treatment system options

If you are discharging to a watercourse, such as a river or a stream, you are required to use an approved sewage treatment plant of the required size (sometimes referred to as a package treatment plant). This uses mechanical parts to treat the wastewater so that it does not pollute the river or stream.

Sites and application's which discharge to surface water have been given **three** options:

- **Option 1:** Upgrade your septic tank with a sewage treatment plant, eliminating the need for any soak away / filtration system.
- **Option 2:** Install a new soakaway / filtration system. This allows the septic tank to discharge to the ground instead of the surface water. Do note that, in many cases, the installation of a soakaway is not possible due to site constraints such as space, building regulations and/or the soil not having sufficient permeability to soakaway effectively. A percolation test must be undertaken to assess the grounds suitability for a soakaway.
- **Option 3:** Connect to the main sewer. Your local water company can confirm if a connection to the mains sewer is an option, however, this is unavailable in a lot of remote areas hence the reason a septic tank was originally required.

Timeframe for new septic tank regulations

Under new guidelines, this upgrade to your sewage treatment system must be in place by 1st January 2020, or when you sell the property (if selling before this date). Should the Environmental Agency find you are currently polluting surface water as a result of discharge from a septic tank, you will be required to install a new system before 2020.

Where new discharges do not comply with the general binding rules and application for a 'consent to discharge' will have to be obtained through the Environment Agency.

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