

Community Wastewater Management System (CWMS)

What is a CWMS?

CWMS is a system designed to collect and treat wastewater from properties using a common network of gravity and pumped mains, pumping stations etc. It is designed to collect, treat, re-use and/or dispose of primary treated effluent (liquid only) from septic tanks on individual properties.

Council, as the manager of CWMS assets, is responsible for the operation, maintenance, upgrading and replacement of the existing system within the district.

Properties within the townships of Berri, Barmera, Monash, Cobdogla, Loveday and Glossop are connected to CWMS.

How do Septic Tanks Work?

Septic tanks operate by holding sewerage in a 2 chambered tank. The bacterial action in the tank breaks down solids and the baffles retain sludge, grease and scum in the tank, allowing water to pass out the other side of the tank and into the CWMS which is made up of a series of pipes and pumping stations which transport the effluent from the septic tanks to the treatment site. Over many years, the amount of sludge accumulating in a tank reduces the amount of space available for efficient biological action and eventually allows sludge and solids to overflow into the councils pipes and drains which are designed to carry water, not sewerage.

Desludging Septic Tanks

As part of the operating and maintenance of Council's Community Wastewater Management System (CWMS), Council provides a septic tank desludging program.

To prevent sludge passing into Council drains, our contractors attend each property on a programmed basis to remove accumulated sludge from the tanks. This work is done as an ongoing maintenance program, not as an emergency call out for plumbing blockages.

Responsibility for maintaining septic tanks and drains within a private property always remains with the property owner. The programmed desludging program is done for the benefit of the overall CWMS, not as a replacement for calling a plumber when you have a blockage.



Some common questions about CWMS are answered here:

Where is my septic tank?

Council may have a copy of a septic tank plan of your property that may be of assistance to you. If not, you may need to contact a plumber to help you find it.

I have sewerage backing up in my drains, I checked my septic and it is full, can you come and pump it out?

No. Septic tanks appear full all the time. They work by being full and forming a crust on the top which keeps air out. That way special bacteria can thrive (that's where the name "septic" comes from). Each time you flush a toilet or drain a bath, an equivalent amount of water comes out of the outlet of the tank and passes into the council drain. If you have blockages upstream from the tank, call a plumber.

What if the blockage is in the council drain?

To check if the blockage is in your property or Councils, you should be able to look in the inspection opening at the boundary of your property. If the pipe is full at the inspection point, the Council drain is blocked. Contact Council to report the blockage. Our staff will attend and clear the blockage in the street or lane. If it is dry, or there is water movement, the blockage is in your property and it is your responsibility to fix the blockage by calling and paying for a plumber.

I can't find an inspection opening at my boundary.

Council staff can advise you where your connection point is. It is your responsibility to make sure there is a surface level inspection opening at the boundary. If it has been buried by landscaping over many years you should arrange for a plumber to bring it to ground level. Similarly, the septic tank should be made accessible as well.

I live out of the town, can Council pump my tank out?

No, if you are not connected to the CMWS, effluent disposal on your property is your responsibility. Tanks which dispose of their effluent to on site soakage drains still need to be desludged routinely (at your cost) as sludge passing into the soakage area will cause an eventual failure of the soakage bed and that will be very expensive to replace. Consult your plumber on this.

How often will my septic tank be desludged?

The desludging program was developed over 10 years ago and set up by dividing the bigger towns into three to four segments or catchment areas so the truck could work street by street through an area, not run from one part of the town to another on an ad-hoc basis.

It is intended that each area/town be fully covered in a four year cycle. Staffing levels, truck maintenance and availability of sludge disposal sites can influence the timing of the program.

How can Council enter my property and do this work?

Council has a legal right under both the Local Government Act 1999 and the Public & Environmental Health Act 1987 to enter your land and do any work associated with the maintenance and running of its CWMS.

If your tank is defective or not readily accessible, you can also be given a formal order to upgrade or replace your tank, or to make the lids accessible, all at your cost.

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