

Are you responsible for properties that have a septic tank? Here is what you need to know.

It is estimated that up to 5% of UK properties are not connected to mains drainage, and instead have their own off mains drainage system such as a septic tank, sewage treatment plant or cesspit. In rural areas, the prevalence of these types of drainage systems is much higher.

If a property is owner-occupied, the responsibility for the maintenance of the drainage system is clear – the buck stops with the property owner. The same applies when it comes to the responsibility for ensuring that the system is compliant with the applicable rules and regulations that apply.

However, when the property is tenanted and managed, things can be less clear-cut. Some tenancy agreements might put the onus onto the tenant, but if a system hasn't been properly maintained across multiple tenancies, who is going to take responsibility for any pollution fines or, worse still, the substantial cost of a new system?

If you are responsible for owning or

managing multiple rural properties connected to a septic tank, or any other off mains drainage system, it can seem daunting. It can be difficult to know what condition the system is in, given that it sits underground and out of sight. Crucially, it can be even more challenging to navigate the rules and regulations set down, and to determine whether each property's system complies.

Keeping you compliant and your drainage systems healthy

UKDP is here to help. We are the UK's septic tank experts. We combine an unrivalled knowledge of septic tanks with a thorough, detailed and proven understanding of the environmental regulator's rules and regulations. What makes us different is our decades of experience. There isn't a scenario we haven't seen so we know what works and how to make it right, first time, every time.

The regulations vary depending on what sort of system is involved. The biggest regulatory change in recent times is the General Binding Rules for Small Sewage Discharge.

There is a raft of rules, regulations and British Standards affecting the design, installation, and maintenance of off mains drainage systems, and all must be considered. As the UK's septic tank experts, our role is to be the experts on each of these, in order that our clients don't need to be. There is one key



regulatory reform that affects septic tanks in England – the General Binding Rules for Small Sewage Discharges – which represents the biggest challenge to estate owners and managers, due to the risk of non-compliance across any properties served by a septic tank.

Most septic tanks will either drain into a local watercourse or ditch, a soakaway system, or a drainage field. The General Binding Rules for Small Sewage Discharges states that septic tanks should only discharge to a drainage field, and that discharges to a watercourse or ditch are no longer allowed. This is because a septic tank provides very little treatment of the waste, and it is no longer considered safe to allow this waste to leave the septic tank and enter into watercourses without some form of further treatment – which can best be provided by a drainage field. A drainage field is a perforated or slotted network of pipes which provide secondary treatment of the waste.

Guidance on the General Binding Rules outlines your options, if your septic tank does not currently discharge to a drainage field:

'If your septic tank discharges directly to a watercourse, you need to do one of the following as soon as possible:

- Connect to mains sewer
- Install a drainage field (also known as an infiltration system) so the septic tank can discharge to ground instead
- Replace your septic tank with a small sewage treatment plant

You must have plans in place to carry out this work within a reasonable timescale, typically 12 months.'

Introduced in 2015, the legislation stated that if your drainage system was

not compliant, it needed to be upgraded or replaced by 1st January 2020. However, as the deadline passed, the guidance was also updated to provide the timescale above.

Furthermore, if you are buying or selling a property with a septic tank, the guidance states:

'If you are buying or selling a property with a septic tank that discharges directly to a

watercourse, you should agree with the buyer or seller who will be responsible for the replacement or upgrade of the existing treatment system. You should agree this as a condition of sale.'

You can rely on us to deal with the

complexity and make sure you are on the right side of the law. We work on behalf of clients across the UK, so we are familiar with the nuances between the different nations' environmental regulators and can ensure that all aspects are complied with.

If you could benefit from our specialist expertise and proven approach, then we would be pleased to assist.

We are here to help. Get in touch.

- Email us at landowners@ukdpsolutions.co.uk or contact our Technical Director at james.warren@ukdpsolutions.co.uk
- Call us on 0800 028 9903
- Find out more at ukdpsolutions.co.uk/landowners



OUR TRIED AND TESTED APPROACH

We already work with some of the UK's biggest landowners and property managers to ensure that their properties' drainage systems are fully compliant with applicable rules and regulations. By engaging us, you can evidence to the environmental regulator your commitment to full compliance, even if that is not achievable immediately. We will always offer a bespoke solution for each client, but we use a tried and tested framework to ensure effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction. The framework has six stages:

1. Appraise

We work with you to understand your current situation, the number and type of properties involved, their physical location and their existing systems. We will also ascertain your preferred timeframes.

2. Prioritise

From the findings of the appraisal, we will be able to identify those properties that are most at risk of being non-compliant, as well as those with the greatest propensity to cause an environmental incident. We will agree these priorities with you.

3. Survey

We will undertake a full survey of the priority groups before rolling this out to the lower-risk groups. The surveys will consider current condition and current compliance.

4. Report

We will create a tailored report that gives you an easy-to-understand overview of the combined survey findings, along

with the more detailed individual survey reports. This will also contain recommendations and the estimated costs associated with the remedial works at each home or property.

5. Remedy

We will agree with you a programme of works and systematically repair or replace systems that have been identified as faulty or non-compliant. This will be done at a pace agreed with you.

6. Maintain

We offer an ongoing maintenance programme to ensure you get the longest service from your drainage systems, either existing or new. We would recommend an annual inspection which would report on any issues, potentially reducing expenditure by identifying problems before they become chronic. In addition, we can manage and co-ordinate a routine emptying and maintenance programme, to ensure that all systems function well and that all manufacturer warranties remain valid.

