

Septic tank odour

Odour from septic tanks can affect neighbours and interfere with their normal activities. If severe enough, it can impact on people's health.

How to reduce odour emissions

You can reduce septic tank odour by:

- perform regular maintenance on your septic tank system and pump it out when needed
- not putting paints, hazardous chemicals, cigarette butts, pet bath water and sanitary napkins down the drain
- not washing grease, fats and oils down your kitchen sink - use environmentally friendly products with low sodium
- making sure the septic trenches and effluent irrigation system is working correctly and not leaking or ponding effluent over the ground
- ensuring there are no cracks in the septic tank lid and grease traps.

Complaints

If you are affected by septic tank odour, talk to the person responsible and try to achieve a solution. Give them time to do something about it.

If you can't reach a solution, you can lodge a complaint with Council. Alternatively, you can contact the Dispute Resolution Centre.

How to lodge a complaint with Council

To lodge a complaint with Council, you will need to provide:

- your name, address and phone number – this is kept confidential
- details of the emissions
 - source address
 - date and time it starts
 - the duration each time it happens.

To help you keep track of the details of the emission, it is a good idea to fill out a daily log that you can submit with your complaint.

How Council handles complaints

Council investigates most septic tank odour using the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*. Some sites have a development approval with conditions. Council investigates complaints about these sites using the *Planning Act 2016*.

When investigating septic tank odour complaints, Council considers:

- whether the site has a development approval with a condition specific to odour emissions
- the amount being emitted
- the duration and rate of emission and the characteristics and qualities
- the sensitivity of the environment and the impact that it has or may have
- views of any other neighbours or complainants
- any measures that have been taken or could reasonably have been taken by the person causing the emission.

If the septic tank odour is unlawful, Council may:

- issue an on-the-spot fine of 15 penalty units (individual) or 75 penalty units (corporation)
- issue a notice. This will detail the offence and the timeframe the responsible person has to rectify the problem. If the person does not comply with the notice, an on-the-spot fine of 15 penalty units (individual) or 75 penalty units (corporation) may also be issued
- prosecute.

If there is a development approval for the site, with a condition about septic tank odour, Council may issue a notice to ensure compliance with the condition. If the person does not comply, a fine of 20 penalty units (individual) or 100 penalty units (corporation) may be issued.

Complaints not investigated by Council

Council shares responsibility for septic tank odour complaints with other authorities. Council does not investigate the following.

- An environmentally relevant activity regulated by the Department of Environment and Science (e.g. chemical manufacturing).
- An environmentally relevant activity regulated by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (e.g. poultry farming).
- A state or local government premises or activity. This is the responsibility of the Department of Environment and Science.

Useful websites

- Dispute Resolution Centre
<https://www.qld.gov.au/law/legal-mediation-and-justice-of-the-peace/setting-disputes-out-of-court/dispute-resolution-centres/>
- Department of Environment and Science
<https://environment.des.qld.gov.au/>
- Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
<https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/>
- Standards Australia
<http://www.standards.org.au/>