

## Fact Sheet

# Bushfire and on-site wastewater systems

On-site wastewater systems such as septic tanks and aerobic wastewater treatment systems can be damaged during a bushfire. This fact sheet provides advice on damage assessment and recovery of on-site wastewater systems immediately following a bushfire event.

## Bushfire damage to on-site wastewater systems

Plastic or fibreglass on-site wastewater systems and systems with plastic components are more susceptible to damage by bushfire than concrete tanks. This includes shallow PVC pipes, plastic tanks and sumps, and plastic irrigation pipework which may be installed above or below ground. Pumps and other equipment with electrical components may also be damaged.

## System recovery after a bushfire

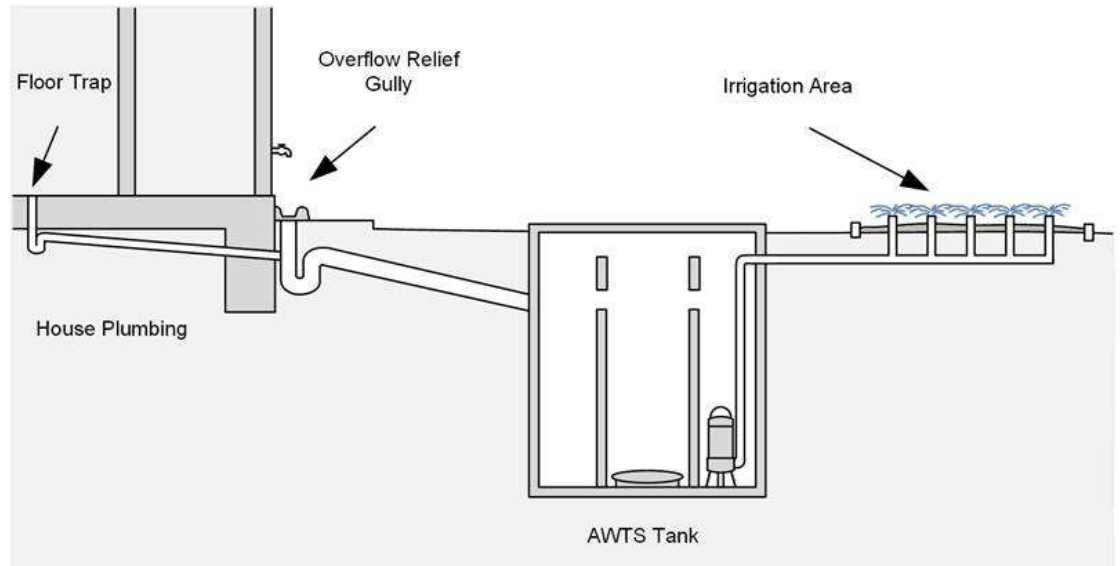
The on-site wastewater system should be inspected after a bushfire by a licenced plumber or service technician to determine the extent of the damage. Appropriate Work Health Safety practices need to be employed on any site affected by bushfire. The system may need to be pumped out prior to the inspection. Concrete tanks (such as septic tanks) are less susceptible to damage but should still be inspected.

If the system is damaged, sewage may back up into the house or onto the ground surface.

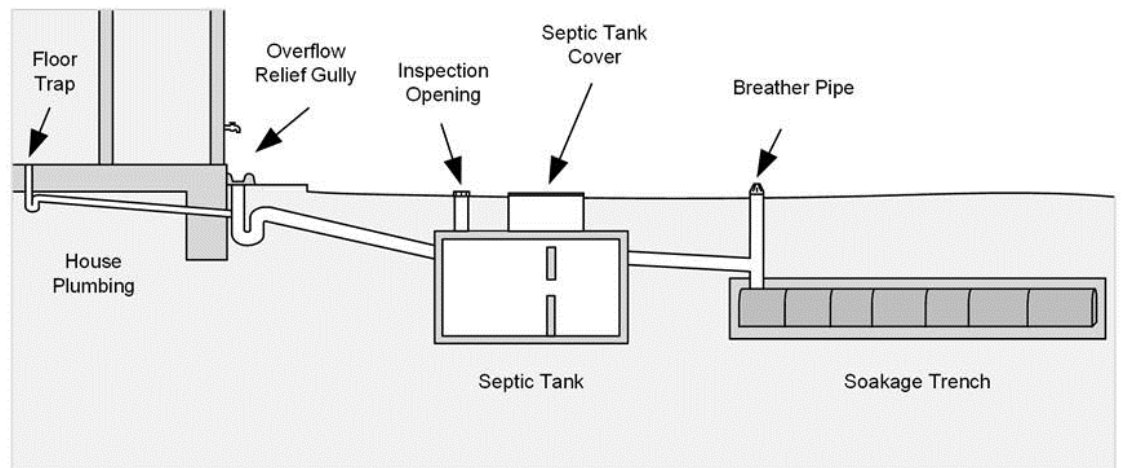
- > Arrangements should be made for repair of the system as soon as possible
- > Reduce water use as much as possible until the system is inspected and repaired
  - Reduce frequency of toilet flushing for liquid waste
  - Take short showers or shower elsewhere
  - Limit laundry and dishwashing as much as possible.
- > If power hasn't been restored or if the irrigation system is damaged, the tank (if undamaged) can be used as a temporary holding tank and pumped-out periodically until the system is fixed. You may need to disconnect the pump (if present) and block the outlet to the land application area.
- > If the tank is significantly damaged and can't be used as a temporary holding tank, the system cannot be used safely until fully repaired or replaced.
- > Shallow PVC pipes may have melted and cause blockages and will need to be replaced.
- > Damaged electrical components and pumps will need to be repaired or replaced as soon as possible.
- > Prevent access to the area as much as possible
  - Underground pipes, tanks and tank covers may be weakened or damaged. Avoid driving or walking over the top of the tank.
  - Once power is restored, wastewater may pool on the surface. Avoid contact with the area until the system is fixed.

Diagrams of common on-site wastewater systems are shown in Figures 1 and 2.





**Figure 1: Aerated wastewater treatment system diagram**



**Figure 2: Septic tank and soakage trench system diagram**

If you have any questions, please contact your local council or the Wastewater Management Section in the Department for Health and Wellbeing on 8226 7100.

## For more information

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