

Frequently asked questions

Registration of small sewage discharges

July 2011

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Part 1 Answers to questions for everyone

These frequently asked questions (FAQs) will help you to understand the process for registering your small sewage discharge as exempt from the need for an environmental permit. It applies to both existing and new discharges and should be read alongside our [summary guidance for householders](#).

Part 1 is mainly aimed at householders who need to register their sewage discharge. [Part 2](#) is aimed at Companies and Public Bodies.

When do I need to register by?

- A discharge to surface water needs to be registered now
- A discharge to ground needs to be registered before 1 January 2012

What if I did not know anything about having to register my septic tank and have gone past the required date? Please register as soon as possible.

Do I have to read lots of guidance? No. You only need to read the [summary guidance for householders](#). This contains the summary criteria for the registration of new and existing discharges.

Our [main guidance report](#) contains the full criteria for registration and supporting text. It is recommended that everyone should read this but it is optional. Our main guidance report sets out our legal and technical requirements for the registration of small sewage effluent discharges.

How do I know if my discharge is going to ground or surface water?

- If your discharge is to ground then you should have a septic tank and an infiltration system (a soakaway) or a package sewage treatment plant (a PTP).
- If it goes to surface water (such as a river, stream or estuary) it will be via a package sewage treatment plant (a PTP).

Can I register if my discharge to surface water is straight from a septic tank? No. You will either need to [apply for an environmental permit](#) or install better treatment for the sewage. Better treatment could include installing a package sewage treatment plant.

Are you expecting me to replace my old system? No, but in order to register you must agree to certain criteria, such as maintaining your sewage treatment system.

Why do I need to register? My sewage system has been working fine for years. New legislation (the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations, 2010) requires us to create a register of small sewage discharges.

Do I have to pay to register? No. There is no charge for registration.

What is the quickest way to register? By registering online. Online applications can be processed much faster, as we have been able to automate much of the process.

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We know that many people will find out about this requirement when they come to sell their house. We recommend the online registration system to all customers, especially those who need the fastest response we can provide.

Can I apply using a paper application? Yes. You can download the paper application form by [clicking here](#). Alternatively you can request a paper application form by calling us on 03708 506 506 (Mon-Fri 8am - 6pm). Applying on paper will take more time than online registration and (for you and for us), so if at all possible, please register online.

What is an existing discharge? If the discharge was already being made before 6 April 2010 it is an **existing** discharge. If you have upgraded or replaced your sewage treatment system (or are planning to do so) but still make the same discharge to the same place, then this is still an existing discharge.

What is a new discharge? A **new** discharge is one that was started after the 6 April 2010. If you have upgraded or replaced your existing treatment system (or are planning to do so) and make the discharge to a different place, then this would be classed as a new discharge.

What do you mean by a sewage treatment system? A sewage treatment system means a septic tank, infiltration system / drainage field (a soakaway) and / or a package sewage treatment works or any other additional treatment in place.

What is a small sewage discharge?

A small sewage discharge can either be to ground or to surface water (such as a river, stream or estuary):

- A discharge to ground of 2 cubic metres per day or less via a septic tank and infiltration system (soakaway) and sometimes a PTP. This is roughly equivalent to 9 people occupying a single property.
- A discharge to a surface water of 5 cubic metres per day or less via a package sewage treatment plant. This is roughly equivalent to 31 people occupying a single property (for example, a small school, residential home, etc.).

How do I work out the volume of my discharge?

Generally, for single properties you can use the 9 or 31 people rule as explained above.

Table 1 below provides a guide on how to estimate the volume of the discharge. For more information and for larger numbers of properties, please see the British Water publication: [Flows and Loads - 3](#).

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Table 1. How to estimate the volume of the discharge.

Number of properties	Can I register if the discharge is to	
	Ground	Surface water
Single property with:		
up to 9 occupants	Yes	Yes
10 - 31 occupants	No	Yes
greater than 31 occupants	No	No
Two properties with:		
up to 7 occupants	Yes	Yes
8 - 29 occupants	No	Yes
greater than 29 occupants	No	No
Three properties with:		
up to 5 occupants	Yes	Yes
6 - 27 occupants	No	Yes
greater than 27 occupants	No	No

If the answer is no you should be able to apply for an environmental permit.

The number of occupants is a simplification of the calculation in 'Flows and Loads - 3' and gives an indication of water use. The number of properties takes into account the number of bathrooms, washing machines and dishwashers that individual properties may have. For new discharges, your installer should be familiar with [Flows and Loads - 3](#).

If you are unsure please contact us on 03708 506 506 Mon-Fri (8am - 6pm).

What is a 12 figure National Grid Reference and how do I find one for my discharge point?

A twelve figure grid reference is 2 letters followed by 10 numbers, for example AB 12345 67890.

Our website and the online system provide a link to a [grid reference finder](#)

All you have to do is enter your postcode and from the aerial photograph, simply find your property and try to identify as closely as possible where the point of discharge is. Right click on this spot and a grid reference will be provided.

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I am applying using the paper application form. Do I have to submit a map? No, please use the [grid reference finder](#). We are currently in the process of updating and simplifying our Application Form and removing this requirement.

How do I know if I am in a sensitive area? If you are not sure, simply register and we will check for you. If you are discharging to ground, then you do need to check whether the discharge is within 50 metres of a well or borehole that is used to supply water. This would normally belong to you or your neighbour.

What if my discharge is a new discharge or I have changed the discharge point, both within a sensitive area? You should register and we will write you a letter telling what to do if we cannot accept your registration.

What do you mean by maintenance? It is your responsibility to look after your system. A properly maintained system is very effective at treating raw sewage. Maintenance could include removal of solids (desludging), following the manufacturer's instructions, keeping the area above the infiltration field clear, being careful of what you put down the sink, etc. Any problems such as ponding of sewage or faults with package sewage treatment plants (PTPs) should be dealt with by a suitably qualified technician (trained in accordance with British Water 'Maintenance and Servicing' Code of Practice). The British Water Codes of Practice guides provide some very useful information on looking after your system:

- [Guide to the desludging of sewage treatment systems](#)
- [A guide for users of small wastewater treatment systems](#)
- [Maintenance and servicing of small wastewater treatment systems \(package plants\)](#)

Does everyone need to have their tank emptied? Septic tanks only have a limited capacity in which sludge can accumulate. If the sludge is not removed the treatment plant will not work efficiently and the quality of the treated effluent will gradually worsen and may well contaminate the environment and / or damage the infiltration system / drainage field (soakaway).

A [Guide to the desludging of sewage treatment systems](#) has been created to enable owners and users to understand how their sewage treatment systems works and why it is important to have the sludge removed periodically.

How often should I have my tank emptied? Wherever possible, you should follow the manufacturer's recommendations and discuss it with the person that comes to maintain or empty your tank as this can vary, for example with low usage / low number of people using the septic tank. British Water recommends that, in the absence of a manual or any other recommendations then 'domestic sewage or wastewater treatment plants' should be desludged every six months.

What records do I have to keep? You should keep any records of for example; tank emptying receipts, maintenance and servicing receipts, repairs, upgrades, manuals, etc.

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I rent a house, who has to register? It is the current occupier not the landlord who has to register. You will need to pass on the details of the registration to the landlord / new occupier if you leave the property.

What if I refuse to register? You would be in breach of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010 (EPR) and could risk further action from us.

Questions about the online process

Can I save what I have done and go back to it later? Unfortunately not as your details are only saved at the end of the process. However, there are a number of search facilities built into the system to make this easier for you. We expect that you should be able to complete your submission within 10-15 minutes.

Why do I need to put my address twice? Our registration system is used for many other different types of exemptions. Some of these other exemptions are much more likely to be in different places. This is why you need to enter your address twice.

Why am I being asked for my date of birth? There are other types of exemptions that use the same online system that want this information, so just leave it blank. You only need to answer the fields marked in red.

Why is it asking if I live on a farm? There are other types of exemptions that want this information, so please just ignore this question.

When I press NEXT the page does not move forward. You may not have completed all of the mandatory sections on the page which are marked with 'required' in red text. All other sections are optional and do not have to be completed. The top of the page will display where the error has occurred and will be highlighted in red lower down.

Will the system correct any spelling mistakes? No, whatever you type in will be shown on your letter of registration. This includes any text you type in (for example, capitals or lower case).

Can I go back and amend any of the information? Yes, if have not already confirmed and submitted the information. By pressing the previous button (located at the bottom of the page) you can go back a page at any stage of the process.

How to use the online system

You only need to complete the fields marked in red. There is the option of providing additional information if you wish but this is not essential. This is because we also use the same online system for the registration of other exemptions which may need slightly different information.

At the start of the registration process you will need to enter a computer generated random code in order to prevent malicious software from infiltrating Environment Agency systems. This is a common

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application called CAPTCHA. If you get it wrong or cannot make out the letters there is the option to try again.

Please note: Internet 'cookies' must be enabled on your browser for our online system to work. If you cannot get past our Captcha screen it may be because you do not have cookies enabled. The following web site gives details of how to adjust cookie settings:

<http://www.aboutcookies.org/Default.aspx?page=1>.

Step 1. About the applicant.

Use the drop down menu to select:

Individual: For an Individual enter your name and address (an address finder is included) and choose your preferred language (English or Welsh).

Click next to continue

Organisation of Individuals: This could be for example, where two properties share a septic tank or a larger group of properties use a single package sewage treatment plant (PTP).

For an Organisation of Individuals use the drop down menu to select either:

Partnership, Group of Individuals, Charity or Club.

You will now need to enter the name of the organisation, the preferred language (English or Welsh) and the address of the organisation (which may be different from where the discharge is).

You can use the Change Applicant option at any time. You will then need to input the name and address of the individual who is taking the lead role.

Click add individual and select.

You can use Update Details and the Remove options if you want to change the details.

Click next to continue

Step 2. Location with exemptions: You need to input the address where the discharge is taking place (even if this is the same address as you have previously entered). Use the [grid reference finder](#) and identify using the aerial maps as precisely as possible where the actual discharge is taking place. Input your 12-character grid reference number into the required field.

Use the Exemption Category drop down menu and select either:

1. Sewage discharge-surface water.

Then select either whether your discharge is new or existing:

001 - New discharges to surface waters of five cubic metres or less; or

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002 - Existing discharges to surface waters of five cubic metres or less.

Click Add. Click next to continue

2. Sewage discharge-into ground.

Then select either whether your discharge is new or existing:

003 - New discharges to ground of two cubic metres or less; or

004 - Existing discharges to ground of two cubic metres or less.

Click Add. Click next to continue

For discharges to ground, you will be asked whether or not the discharge is within 50 metres of a well or borehole that is used to supply water:

If the answer is yes to this question you will not be eligible for registration: If you wish to progress further you will need to apply for a permit. Please press the 'Cancel' button below to exit the current application and select **EP Permit, New Application** to apply for a permit.

If the answer is no, Click next to continue

Step 3. Summary and declaration: Make sure you are happy with all the details before ticking the declaration box. Has the applicant read the guidance, understood and accepted the limits of the exemption(s) and confirmed that the information provided in this application is correct? The applicant confirms that he / she has not previously registered a duplicate exemption(s) at this location.

Click submit.

Your request for a registration is now complete.

Following your registration

Will I be registered as soon as I complete my online application? No, as your submission will not have been checked. We will respond within 15 working days (3 weeks) by writing to you.

How will I know if my registration was successful? Almost all householders with a small sewage discharge will be able to register as exempt and will get confirmation by letter within 15 working days (3 weeks). If you apply online it will usually be much sooner.

Following your registration we will check to make sure your discharge is not near to a protected or designated area for the natural environment. In some cases, we may not be able to accept a registration - if there is a problem we will write to let you know.

What if you tell me that I am not eligible for registration? Following submission of your registration we will write a letter to you to let you know if the discharge can be registered. If it cannot, we will tell you what you have to do. If we cannot accept your registration, then you will need to apply for an environmental permit.

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Although registration is free, we make a one-off charge for a permit application as we have to assess the risks posed by the discharge. A reduced one-off fee of £125 applies. Full details on fees and charges can be found on our website by clicking [here](#).

What if I move house? There is no need to inform us if the property changes hands and a new occupier takes over responsibility for the discharge. But you do need to give the next occupier the information listed below, and the confirmation of the registration letter that you receive from us and a copy of the guidance should satisfy the first 3:

- the fact that an exempt water discharge activity or groundwater activity is being carried out on the land;
- a description of the registration;
- the criteria that must be satisfied for registration to continue; and
- records of any maintenance and repair (minimum 5 years).

What if I no longer need or use my sewage system? You need to tell [us](#) if you stop your small sewage discharge. For example, if you subsequently make a connection to the foul sewer. The details of the discharge will then be removed from the register. You may also need to consider decommissioning your system.

For Companies and Public Bodies please go to Part 2

Part 2 Questions for Companies and Public Bodies

Questions for Companies

What is my Companies house number? All Limited Companies in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland are registered at Companies House, an Executive Agency of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

I cannot find my Company in the Company name search facility? The search box automatically defaults to 'equals' and if what you have typed in does not match exactly it will not show your details. You will need to change the drop down box and select 'contains'. You can then type in part of your Company name and search.

What if I do not know our Companies House number? You can also find your Company by using the Company name search instead.

Why does it not accept our Companies House number? Try inserting a zero before your registration number. If you still have problems please contact [us](#) for help.

I have entered my Companies House number and Company name but it still says unable to find a matching Company? The system will not return your Company details if you have entered details

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in both the number and name boxes. You must only complete either the number or the name and select: Find Company.

Our Companies House information is different to that on the system. We use the information on your Company provided by Companies House. If your details have changed you should have informed Companies House.

If you have already informed Companies House of those changes and your details are still wrong on our system then you can input your current address details, using the 'create' button.

If you have created an address, this will then have to be verified by our team before your application is fully processed. You will receive confirmation via email or letter that you are registered. We may contact you if we need to as part of the verification process.

I changed our Companies House address using the 'create' button when I made the application, so why have you changed it back? When we carry out verification of your details we make additional checks with Companies House. We can only register valid Company names and addresses, so it is important you ensure your company details are maintained with Companies House. If we are unable to verify the address you have provided, using this or other methods, then we will contact you to discuss this.

How can I get my Companies House information changed? You will need to speak to Companies House directly regarding your details.

We are a company based outside the UK, can we register online? No, you will need to complete the electronic application form or a paper form if you do not have a UK address.

Questions for Public Bodies

I cannot find my Public Body on the list and there is not an option to type it in. What do I do? We are working on improving the number of Public Bodies pre-populated in our system.

In the interim, customers can apply using the electronic application form. When we receive this we will put your organisation onto our system so that next time you need to apply you should be able to find your organisation and do this online.

How to contact us

Please email to enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk or you can call us on 03708 506 506. Or contact us at the address below:

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