

# Plan Change 1 – On-site Wastewater



## What is happening?

About 30% of houses in the Gisborne District are not connected to a sewer that gets rid of wastewater and your property is one of these. You likely have an on-site wastewater system such as a septic tank. All on-site wastewater systems discharge some wastewater into the soil and these discharges need to be managed so they don't affect people's health or the environment.

Council has rules in place to manage wastewater discharges in the Discharges Plan. Council has reviewed these rules and proposes several changes to the Discharges Plan to replace Chapter 7 and Appendix 5 and update Chapter 1. The review is known as Plan Change 1 and this document summarises the proposed changes.

If you have an on-site wastewater system then these proposed changes would affect you.

## Why are these changes needed?

If wastewater is not adequately treated, stored and disposed of, this can harm public health and the environment.

The Council thinks that changes are needed because:

- The current rules do not protect the environment as well as they could. In some parts of the District soils do not drain very well, there is unstable or steeply sloping land and places where the water table is high. These can all cause problems for wastewater systems. There are few controls in the current Discharges Plan about the distance wastewater systems should be from these difficult areas.
- Limited land space on some properties, particularly in townships, makes it more difficult to effectively treat wastewater because of the amount of land required to run a well-functioning system.
- There are lots of ageing and some complex wastewater systems in the district that need to be well cared for. Cleaning and maintenance of systems helps to prolong their life and to ensure they function effectively. Although it is encouraged, there is nothing in the current Discharges Plan that formally requires people to clean or maintain their systems.
- Some systems are not working properly, which can cause problems for people's health and the environment. It is not clear from the plan at what point they should be upgraded or replaced.
- Human waste has been found to be in ground and surface water in some townships and by the coast.
- Some popular and acceptable options for managing wastewater on-site, such as "advanced" wastewater treatment systems, greywater systems, composting toilets, and occasional use systems such as long drops, are not identified in the Discharges Plan and automatically require resource consent before they can be used.
- Some people have told Council that they would like to know more about choosing, living with and maintaining wastewater and greywater treatment and disposal systems.

## How will the proposed changes affect my property?

Gisborne City and Te Karaka are the only places where there is a sewer to get rid of wastewater from individual properties.

Some of the proposed changes affect **all** properties in the district not connected to a sewer:

- There would be different rules for different types of wastewater systems, such as “advanced” wastewater treatment systems, greywater systems, composting toilets, traditional systems like septic tanks and occasional use systems such as long drops. At present there is one rule for all systems. It will also be clear in what locations different systems are suitable.
- You would not need a resource consent for some types of systems as long as the system meets certain conditions aimed at protecting the environment. Some systems will still require resource consent. The focus will be on good overall system design for your property, rather than just how big the tank is and how much land it is on.
- You would need to put your system a certain distance away from difficult areas or where there are underground obstructions to drainage. This is to protect the environment and ensure that discharges do not concentrate in one area.
- You would need a higher level of wastewater treatment if the soil on your property can’t adequately process wastewater.
- There would be new rules for when you no longer need to use a system, such as when a house is removed from a property. If wastewater systems are not properly taken out of service they can pose serious safety and environmental risks.
- If you use temporary and permanent holding tanks, such as for camping, there would be rules about managing wastewater in these tanks to protect coastal and reserve environments.
- It would be easier to understand when your existing wastewater systems should be repaired, upgraded or replaced. There will be a clearer description of what a “failing” system is.
- If you are proposing a new system and it could affect other people or the environment, then Council could choose to notify other people about the proposal before it is approved and seek their input.
- There are new rules for managing the contents taken out of wastewater systems when they are cleaned, if you bury these on your own property.
- Compulsory maintenance is also required for all “advanced” treatment systems. How often these systems are serviced will depend on what the system manufacturer recommends – usually a service is required every six or 12 months.

In addition to the proposed changes in the previous section, there are some more proposed changes that would only affect properties in certain zones:

- General Residential
- Rural Lifestyle
- Reserve
- Commercial
- Industrial

If you live in one of these zones, and there is no sewer available, you would be required to clean out your septic tank at least once every five years or when it is two thirds full of sludge/scum – whichever happens first.

Cleaning and inspection helps to identify problems before they occur and helps to avoid or minimise environmental harm. It will be compulsory in these locations because the risk of environmental harm is highest as there are a lot of systems close together.

It is easy to find out whether your property is in one of these zones. You can have a look at the district plan maps on the Council website or ring the planning helpdesk.

## **How would the cleaning and inspection scheme work?**

For typical septic tanks, you will need to arrange for your tank to be cleaned by a suitable tradesperson within five years, or when the tank is two thirds full.

Once the tank is empty, the tank cleaner or other suitably qualified person will carry out a simple inspection. This person will check whether important parts of the tank are present and in working order and carry out a visual check of the wastewater drainage field.

The inspector will give the system an overall rating and tell you whether you need to do anything, such as make a minor repair or contact a drainlayer or Council. Either the system owner or the cleaner will provide a written record of the inspection to Council within 60 days.

For “advanced” treatment systems, you will need to follow the manufacturer’s instructions for maintenance and servicing and provide Council with a written record of the work carried out.

## **Technical information and education**

Council staff have updated the *Guidelines for On-Site Wastewater Management* that are used by Council staff, land development practitioners, wastewater system designers and installers, service and maintenance persons, equipment suppliers and component manufacturers. These will now be referenced inside the Discharges Plan and provide a minimum standard for systems to meet, but the new rules would also allow other designs to be considered by Council staff.

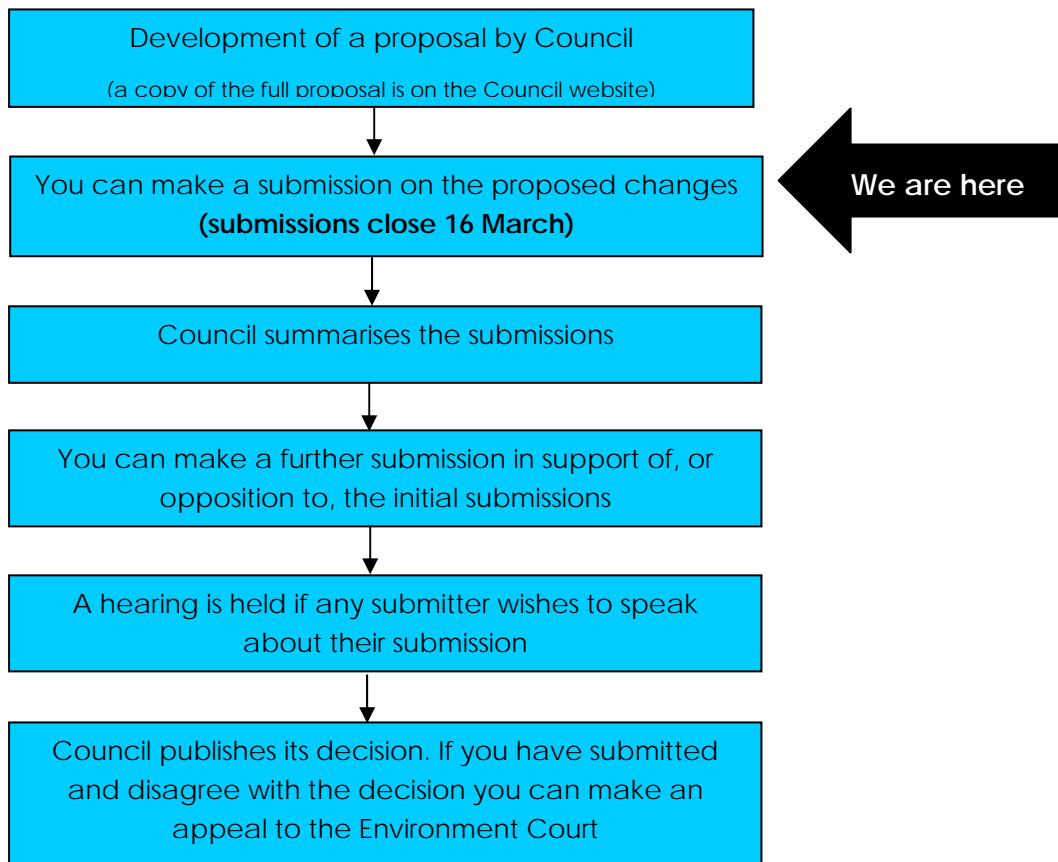
An information booklet called *Your Septic System – What You Need to Know - A User’s Guide to Home Wastewater Systems* has been prepared for system owners. It provides information about local conditions, system types, and tips for living with an on-site wastewater system including maintenance.

Council staff will continue to educate all wastewater system owners and users, including informing system owners about the benefits of maintenance and cleaning, even in areas where five-yearly cleaning and inspection is not compulsory.

Retrofitting wastewater treatment systems with a filter can improve the quality of wastewater that will eventually get into ground and surface water. Council will encourage people to retrofit their tanks with filters or require them as a consent condition where necessary.

## What is the change process?

The proposed changes are going through the following plan change process under the Resource Management Act (1991):



## What do you think about these changes?

You can have your say on the proposed changes by:

1. Having a look at the full report on proposed Plan Change 1
2. Making a submission that includes whether you support or oppose the changes

Submissions must be received by Council before **5pm, Friday 16 March 2012**.

For more information contact Jo Callis on (06) 8672049 (0800 653 800 East Coast Callers), or by email at: [jo.callis@gdc.govt.nz](mailto:jo.callis@gdc.govt.nz).

The full report and submission form for Proposed Plan Change 1 can be viewed at:

- Council's website [www.gdc.govt.nz/have-your-say-on-our-plans/](http://www.gdc.govt.nz/have-your-say-on-our-plans/)
- Council's Fitzherbert Street office and Te Puia Springs office or the HB Williams Memorial Library.