

Summary guidance for householders who need to register a sewage discharge

Registering a discharge of sewage effluent from a septic tank or sewage treatment plant may seem daunting at first but for most householders the process is quite straight forward.

This summary contains information on how to register and what it means for you. Diagram 1 is a flowchart that indicates if you might be eligible to register. [Table 2](#) is a condensed list of the conditions for registration. You should also refer to the technical guidance document, where the conditions are explained in full. See: www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/water/117485.aspx

Note:

- **Registration is free.**
- **You only need to register once**
- **Discharges to rivers or streams must be registered immediately.**
- **Those to ground may be registered at any time before 1 January 2012.**

You should understand that while most householders with a sewage effluent discharge will be able to register, we may not be able to accept a registration if it is close to a nature conservation area. We will check for this when you register.

If we can't accept the registration for any reason then we will write to suggest you apply for a permit. Although registration is free, there is a one-off charge for a permit application as we have to make an assessment of the risks of the discharge. There is a reduced application fee (currently £125 in 2010) for discharges of 5 cubic metres per day or less. Further details on the latest fees and charges can be found on our website at: <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/regulation/38807.aspx>

You should know the following before you register the discharge:

1. **Whether you already have a permit for the discharge.**

If you have previously been issued with a 'Consent to Discharge' or Environmental Permit for the effluent then you do not need to register:

- If the discharge qualifies for exempt status then it will have automatically become exempt and we will place the details on the register;
- If the discharge does not qualify for exempt status then the Consent has become an Environmental Permit and the conditions are identical to those on the Consent (we do not issue a new permit but your Consent is now called an Environmental Permit).
- If you have an Environmental Permit for the discharge, issued since 6 April 2010, you do not need to register.

In these cases, you do not need to do anything other than ensure that treatment plant is operated and maintained properly.

2. The type of sewage system that you have.

You could have a septic tank, a sewage treatment plant or a cesspool to deal with the sewage from your house. Cesspools do not need to be registered as they are sealed tanks with no discharge to the environment. Cesspools usually need emptying every few weeks.

Septic tank

A septic tank is a simple tank that is usually buried in the ground; it has an inflow of sewage from the house and an outflow from the tank. The septic tank allows solid matter to settle in the tank and liquids to flow out. The outflow from the septic tank requires further treatment and this is normally achieved by soaking it away into the ground, where bacteria in the soil complete the treatment process. Normal maintenance for a septic tank would be removal of the accumulated solid matter (sludge) from the bottom of the tank. This is known as desludging and is usually required about once every year.

If you have a septic tank that discharges directly to surface water, you will not be able to register an exemption. You will need to apply for a permit to make the discharge and if granted, this will almost certainly require you to upgrade to a treatment plant. We will usually allow up to 12 months to complete an upgrade, although this depends on individual circumstances.

Sewage treatment plant

Often called 'package' plants, these sewage treatment plants are like mini sewage works and produce much cleaner effluent than septic tanks. For this reason, effluent from package treatment plants can normally be discharged to surface waters such as rivers or streams. Package treatment plants are more sophisticated than septic tanks and require a source of power as well as regular maintenance. They also accumulate solid matter (sludge) that is settled out from the sewage and require desludging about once every year.

3. The size of your sewage system

If you want to register the discharge as exempt, there is a restriction on the amount of sewage effluent that can be discharged from the septic tank or treatment plant. If the discharge is being made to a surface water then it must not be more than 5 cubic metres per day (5000 litres per day) and it must first be treated in a package treatment plant. If the discharge is being made to ground then it must not be more than 2 cubic metres per day (2000 litres per day) and must first receive a minimum secondary treatment.

You need to know whether your discharge is within the permitted maximum daily volume. Volumes are shown in table 1 below for discharges from a single domestic property. If you are making a discharge from premises other than a single domestic property, for example from a group of houses, a guest house or a very large house, the volume should be determined using the Industry code of practice known as 'Flows and Loads – 3', which is available from British Water at: www.britishwater.co.uk.

Table 1

Number of bedrooms in your house	Daily volume (cubic metres per day)
1 to 3	0.90
4	1.08
5	1.26
6	1.44
7	1.62
8	1.80

4. Whether the discharge is 'new' or 'existing'

If the discharge was already being made before 6 April 2010 it is an existing discharge. If it was first made on or after 6 April 2010 then it is a new discharge. New systems must be designed, constructed

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and installed in accordance with current British Standards. Both new and existing eligible discharges must be registered.

If you upgrade or replace your treatment system but make the discharge to the same place as a previous one that was already being made before 6 April 2010, then we still consider this to be an existing discharge. Upgraded or new equipment should meet current British Standards.

5. The location of the discharge

We need to know whether the discharge is being made to a surface water (for example a river or stream) or to ground (through the ground via a drainage field or infiltration system, sometimes called a soakaway). We also need the postal address, including post code and a national grid reference of the location where the discharge is being made. If you are applying using a form rather than online, we may also require a map.

Sometimes the sewage treatment system and/or discharge point for the effluent is not on the same land as the property where the sewage comes from. If this is the case we consider the occupier that should register to be at the property where the sewage comes from. If more than one house is connected to the sewage treatment system, there is no need for every house to register; we only require one of the houses that are connected to the system to register. If the treatment system is located at one of these properties, this would be the most suitable one to register.

If you are making a discharge to ground, you must check with neighbouring properties to ensure that no-one abstracts drinking water (for example from a well, spring or borehole) within 50 metres of the point where you will discharge the sewage effluent.

We will check to make sure your discharge is not near to a protected or designated area for the natural environment before we can accept your registration.

National grid reference

We need a 12-character National Grid Reference for the **point where the effluent discharges to the environment**. This might be the point at which it enters a river or stream, or the point at which it enters the ground if an infiltration system is being used. A 12-character NGR consists of 2 letters followed by 10 numbers (for example AB 12345 67890). You can obtain a 12-character NGR using a large scale map or by looking online at mapping websites. A link to one such site is here:

www.ukgr.dreamhosters.com/

6. How to register

You can register the discharge from your septic tank or treatment plant either online or by paper form. Online registration will normally provide a quicker response. To register please visit the following web page: <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/water/122003.aspx>

You can request a form by calling us on 08708 506 506

What happens after registration

We will inform you within 15 working days if your registration has been successful. If you apply online it will usually be much sooner.

To maintain your exempt status you must continue to keep to the registration conditions (see table 2 below); this includes undertaking proper inspection, operation and maintenance of your sewage treatment system, regular removal of excess sludge from the system by a properly authorised contractor and making records of maintenance and repair, which must be kept for at least 5 years. In addition, the treatment system must not cause pollution.

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British Water has produced “a guide for users of small wastewater treatment systems”, which provides useful information and is available from their website:

http://www.britishwater.co.uk/publications/Publications_and_Technical_Guides.aspx

If you fail to keep to the conditions, your discharge will no longer be exempt, you may be committing an offence and we can take enforcement action if necessary.

What if I move house?

If you sell or leave the property you do not need tell us, but you must pass written details of the exempt discharge onto the new occupier. You need to tell them that there is an exempt discharge at the property, what it is (a discharge from a septic tank to an infiltration system) and the conditions they must keep to stay exempt. You must also pass on to the new occupier any maintenance records.

Please take time to read the full guidance document in order to fully understand your responsibilities.

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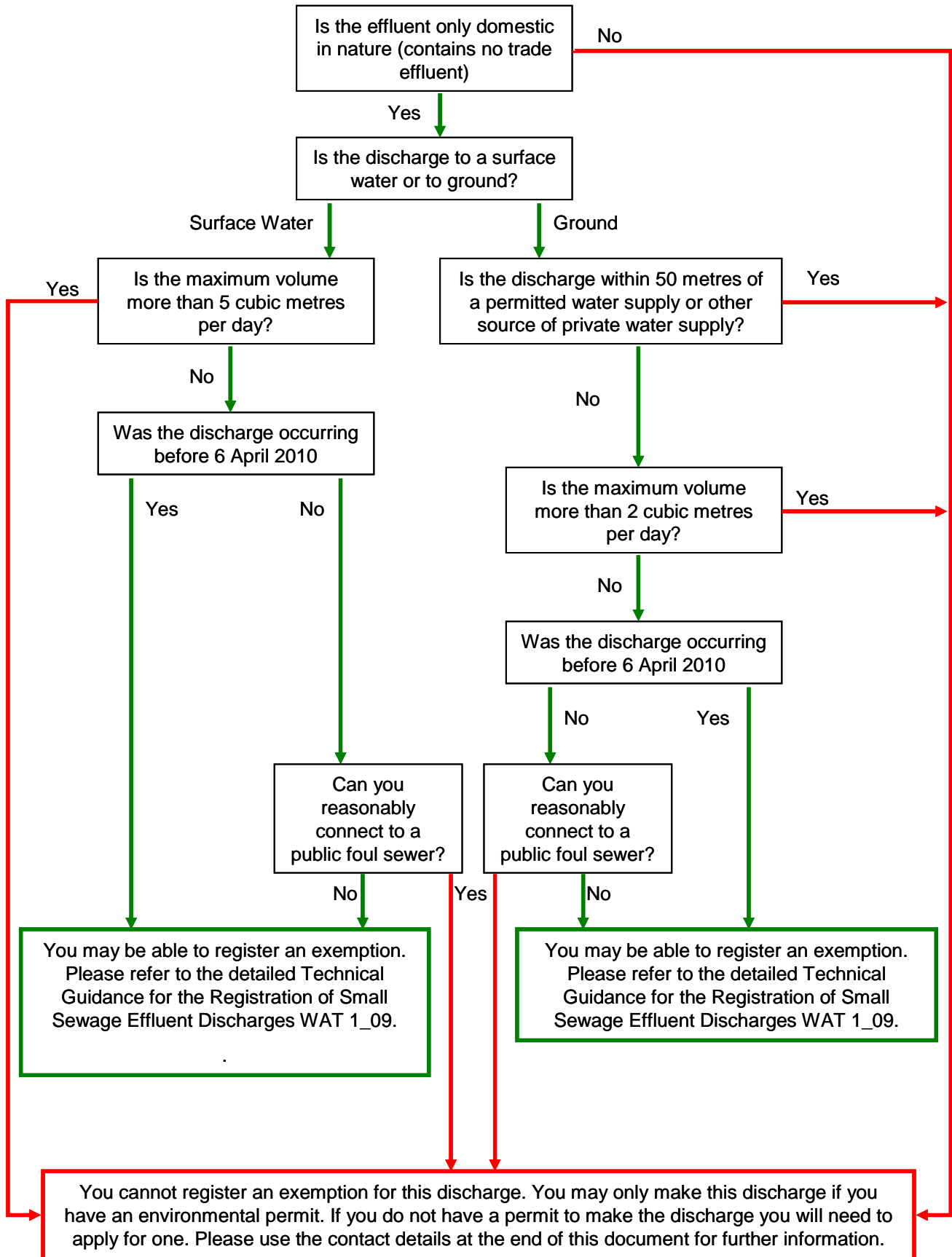
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DIAGRAM 1



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Table 2 Condensed summary of conditions for registration of a small sewage discharge activity as exempt – full conditions are given in the main body of the guidance

2a Discharges to surface water	New discharge to surface water	Existing discharge to surface water
You must have obtained any necessary planning and building control approval	✓	
The sewage must be only domestic	✓	✓
The discharge must not be within 30 metres of a public foul sewer	✓	
The discharge must not be more than 5 cubic metres per day in volume	✓	✓
The discharge must be to a watercourse that normally contains water throughout the year. The discharge can't be to a lake or pond.	✓	
The discharge must be at least 500 metres away from a nature conservation area (we check for this)	✓	
The discharge must be further than 50 metres away from an identified bathing water or a designated shellfishery (we check for this)	✓	
In tidal waters, the discharge outlet must be below low water mark.	✓	✓
The sewage must be from a treatment plant, not a septic tank	✓	✓
The sewage treatment plant must meet current British Standards	✓	
The sewage treatment plant must be installed and operated in accordance with the manufacturer's specification. You must have a maintenance plan.	✓	✓
Systems incorporating a partial infiltration system or drainage field prior to discharge to surface waters, must include a package sewage treatment plant and the drainage field must be within 10 metres of the bank of the watercourse	✓	
Maintenance must be done by someone who is competent	✓	✓
Waste sludge from the system must be safely disposed of using competent, authorised contractors	✓	✓
Maintenance records must be kept for 5 years	✓	✓
The discharge must not cause pollution of surface water or groundwater	✓	✓

2b Discharges to ground (through the ground via a drainage field or infiltration system)	New discharge to ground	Existing discharge to ground
You must have obtained any necessary planning and building control approval	✓	
The sewage must be only domestic	✓	✓
The discharge must not be within 30 metres of a public foul sewer	✓	
The discharge must not be more than 2 cubic metres per day in volume	✓	✓
The discharge must be at least 50 metres away from a nature conservation area (we check for this)	✓	
The discharge must be outside a Groundwater Source Protection Zone 1 (we check for this), and be at least 50 metres away from any other drinking water source	✓	✓
The sewage must receive adequate treatment	✓	✓
The sewage treatment system must meet current British Standards	✓	
The system must be installed and operated in accordance with the manufacturer's specification. You must have a maintenance plan	✓	✓
The discharge must only be made to a properly installed infiltration system or drainage field. There must be no discharge to surface waters	✓	✓
Maintenance must be undertaken by someone who is competent	✓	✓
Waste sludge from the system must be safely disposed of using competent, authorised contractors	✓	✓
Maintenance records must be kept for 5 years	✓	✓
The discharge must not cause pollution of surface water or groundwater	✓	✓

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