

URGENT!

General Binding Rules

Your guide to the Environment Agency's General Binding Rules, by GRAF UK



Firstly, let's clarify the rules...

New rules came into force on 1 January 2015. If your system was installed and discharging before **31 December 2014** you have an 'existing discharge'. If your system was installed and discharging on or after **1 January 2015** you have a 'new discharge'. Rules for both existing and new discharges are as follows;

1. Use the correct treatment system - You must use a septic tank or a small sewage treatment plant to treat the sewage and then discharge the effluent to ground via a drainage field. NB. You cannot use a soakaway (designed for draining rainwater), well or borehole for discharging effluent to ground. Instead you must either upgrade to a drainage field or apply for a permit so that the Environment Agency can assess the risk of using this sort of system in your location.
2. Your treatment plant must meet the right British Standard - the standards currently in force for new systems are; BS EN 12566 for septic tanks and small sewage treatment plants BS 6297:2007 for drainage fields.
3. Your treatment plant must be installed correctly and have enough capacity
4. Have your treatment system regularly emptied and maintained
5. If you sell your property: tell the new owner about the sewage treatment system
6. If you stop using your treatment system: make sure it's properly decommissioned

The rules are designed to reduce the level of pollution from sewage in the nation's watercourses. Under the General Binding Rules which were updated in November 2019, anyone with a septic tank discharging into a watercourse must have plans in place to replace it or upgrade the foul water solution within a reasonable timescale, typically 12 months, or sooner if the property is due to be sold or if the Environment Agency finds it is causing pollution.

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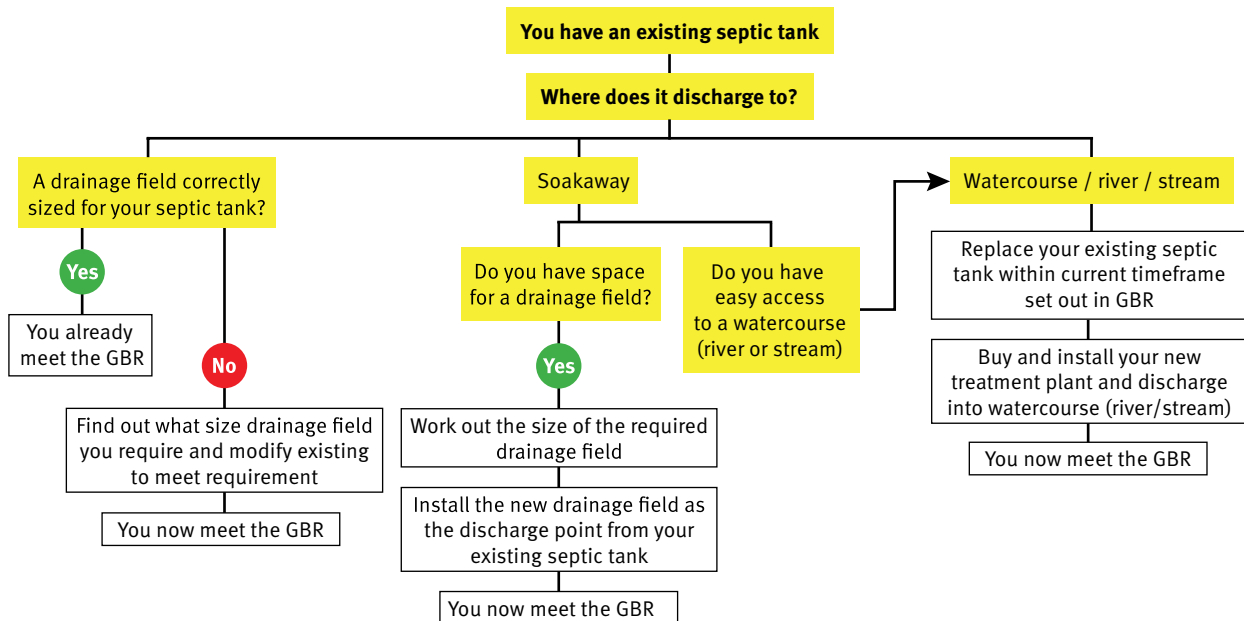


So, what can you do? How can systems be replaced?

There are 5 options available to you;

1. Systems can be replaced by connecting to a mains sewer, if one is available.
2. You can install a drainage field (infiltration system) so that the septic tank discharges into the ground, if you have the available space to do so.
3. Systems can be replaced with a small sewage treatment plant.
4. In exceptional circumstances, a permit can be applied for to allow discharge to surface water.
5. You cannot use a septic tank conversion unit or a reedbed for discharging effluent to a watercourse under the general binding rules. Instead you must either upgrade to a package treatment plant or apply for a permit so that the Environment Agency can assess the risk of using this sort of system in your location. If you apply for a permit you will need to include supporting information to show that the treatment system will treat your sewage to an appropriate standard.

Follow this flow chart to establish what you should do in order to make sure your treatment system meets the general binding rules.



What's it going to cost?

In what we believe to be the order of lowest cost to meet the new rules, up to highest amount that it may cost to get compliant, here's our estimation of what you may have to budget for...

1. Lowest cost is most likely to be to connect to a mains sewer, if there is one available. Although we're guessing this is an unlikely option for the majority of people, otherwise a septic tank probably wouldn't have been installed in the first place!
2. Next best cost is probably to install a new sewage treatment plant or install a septic tank conversion unit to your existing septic tank, if you're allowed to do so. Either of these options is likely to start at somewhere around £2000, based on the fact that a 3-bed house would need a minimum of a 5PE treatment plant which is going to cost c. £2k but installation on top of this will vary greatly but could add a further £5k to £10k depending on lots of variables.
4. Closer to the top of the list of highest costs would be to install a drainage field for your septic tank to discharge to, if you have the space to do this. This may be similar to the cost of new sewage treatment plant, it depends on the size of the drainage field you need for your system. This depends on the land available and your soil conditions. The size of this drainage field could mean metres and metres of perforated pipe, which can mean a significant area of land has to be excavated for installation. It's difficult to put a sum on this as it depends greatly on the percolation rate of your soil but it's not likely to be a small area to dig up and therefore the labour and plant hire alone is likely to cost more than some of the above options.

We hope you found this guide useful. Details are provided in good faith and believed to be correct at the time of writing; however, no responsibility is taken for any errors. Further information can be found on the GOV.UK website under the Environment and countryside menu.