CORNWALL HOUSING

Information Classification: CONTROLLED

PRIVATE DRAINAGE (WASTEWATER) MANAGEMENT STANDARD

A CORNWALL COUNCIL COMPANY

Policy Title	INSERT PRIVATE DRAINAGE (WASTEWATER) MANAGEMENT STANDARD		
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1. INTRODUCTION

This Management Standard expands on CHL's overarching Environmental Policy Statement and Environmental Management Standard.

CHL is responsible for the inspection, servicing and maintenance of approximately 104 private drainage systems serving over 450 domestic properties spread across the county of Cornwall.

There are a mixture of domestic properties served by these systems. Over half of the systems are managed by Cornwall Housing, however a significant number of properties have been sold through the right to buy scheme and are now owned by freeholders.

All freeholders who benefit from the use of the private drainage infrastructure should be recharged via the Right to Buy Team, however not all the properties which have been sold included the clause within their conveyances which allows CHL to recharge them for the maintenance, renewal, replacement and repairs to the drainage system.

CHL must ensure the systems are maintained in line with the Environmental Permitting Regulations 2014. If the systems are not maintained correctly, CHL will be at risk of prosecution by the Environment Agency.

2. SCOPE

This management standard applies to all private drainage systems, including sewage treatment plants and drainage fields, septic tanks and soakaways and sewage pumping stations under the direct control of CHL Limited.

3. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The regulatory framework associated with private drainage has changed in recent years, however there are clear requirements associated with the maintenance and operation of private drainage systems overseen by the regulator, the Environment Agency.

3.1 Legislation

In order to ensure CHL is compliant with all relevant environmental, legal and regulatory requirements, it maintains an environmental compliance register.

The register is stored in an electronic format on SharePoint and updated regularly by the Environmental Compliance Manager.

A summary of some (not all) significant legislation for private drainage is outlined below;

- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992
- Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011
- Control of Pollution (Oil Storage) Regulations (England) 2001
- The Water Resources Act 1991
- Hazardous Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2005 (Amendment 2009)
- The Building Regulations 2010 (Part H)
- Controlled Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2012
- Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2014
- Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016
- Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2023

3.2 Environmental Permitting Regulations (EPR)

The Environmental Permitting Regulations (EPR) in relation to private drainage infrastructure such as septic tanks and sewage treatment plants are regulated by the Environment Agency.

Some private drainage systems require an Environmental Permit, which sets out very clear permit conditions under which the sewage treatment plant or septic tank should operate.

CHL holds multiple permits on behalf of Cornwall Council for private drainage infrastructure. The Environmental Permits are saved on Sharepoint. The requirements of the permits are documented within the Compliance Reviews.

Annual subsistence fees for Environmental Permits are charged by the Environment Agency and should be paid promptly.

The Environmental Permitting Regulations were updated in 2016) and have provided additional rules for small sewage discharges from septic tanks or sewage treatment plants. These rules are known as the General Binding Rules (GBR)

3.3 General Binding Rules (GBR)

The General Binding Rules (GBR) set out the conditions in the Environmental Permitting Regulations 2016 that allow you to use a septic tank or sewage treatment plant without an environmental permit.

The new septic tank rules for small sewage discharges came into force on 1 January 2015.

If a septic tank system was installed and in use before 31 December 2014, it is classed as an 'existing discharge'. If the date of construction was before 31 December 2014 it was compliant at the date of construction and systems should be considered as compliant.

However, rules for both existing and new septic tank and small sewage discharges in England state: A 'Small Sewage Discharge' is classified as no more than:

- 2 cubic metres/day (13 people) to ground via a soakaway.
- 5 cubic metres/day (33 people) to a watercourse. This includes a ditch, but only if it has a flow of water, even a trickle, throughout the year. If it is dry during the summer, a Permit is needed.

Under the new General Binding Rules, if a septic tank discharges directly to a surface water (ditch, stream, river, etc.) you must replace or upgrade your septic tank treatment system to a full sewage treatment plant as soon as possible, or when you sell your property.

3.4 Private Drainage Compliance Review

CHL undertook a comprehensive compliance review of all private drainage systems in 2023/2024.

The review identified a number of sites which require improvement work to ensure the systems are compliant with the Environmental Permitting Regulations. The results of the compliance review are saved on Sharepoint..

Full compliance review's should take place once every five years to ensure the private drainage systems are compliant with the latest regulations and undertake improvement work where they are not.

3.5 Surface Water

Surface water (from roofs and guttering) should not be entering the private drainage system. All sites which hold an environmental permit require surface water to be disposed of separately.

Private drainage systems which are connected to surface water require emptying more frequently (at great cost) and will also be in breach of the Environmental Permitting Regulations and Building Control Regulations (Part H).

Any CHL properties identified with surface water connected to the private drainage system should be removed immediately.

Ant freehold properties identified with surface water connections should be written to request all surface water is removed immediately at their own cost.

4. SITE INFORMATION

A complete list of all CHL private drainage systems is available on SharePoint.

4.1 Mapping

All private drainage infrastructure is mapped on the CHL Intranet Mapping system. The mapping system documents the drainage maps (to the best of our knowledge) and is updated on a regular basis following drainage inspections, and CCTV surveys.

This information is passed to the GIS Technical Officer in Assets (Andy Caff) to update the mapping system.

All private drainage sites have their own site location sheet, documenting key information including system type, make, model, age of installation, drainage map. Site location sheets are saved on Sharepoint.

4.2 Access

Many assets are located within fenced compounds, access gates locked with a standard or combination padlocks (The code is 6880).

Control Kiosks generally have a standard lock / padlock. Some sites may present access difficulties for large vehicles such as tankers, and suitable arrangements will need to be made to complete the necessary visits/works at these sites.

Where a contractor identifies an access fault or failure or has concerns with the fencing and/or gates of the sewage compound or leading to the compound via the access route, CHL should be informed immediately, who will organise for any necessary to works to be undertaken as a priority.

The contractor should provide full details including photos of any such occurrences to allow prompt actions to be undertaken.

A complete list of sites with access requirements is saved on Sharepoint

4.3 Power Supply

The majority of the sewage treatment plants have a dedicated metered electricity supply. The meters in most cases, are located within the Control Kiosk within the compound and have in some cases, resulted in inflated electricity charges being based on estimated readings.

To ensure for the future electricity charges are based on actual meter readings, the Contractor is required to include details from the electrical meter on their 6 monthly report, and this must include;

- Site Name
- Meter Number
- Date
- Time
- Meter Reading
- Name of the Attendee providing these details

5. CYCLICAL MAINTENANCE

The regulatory framework requires private drainage infrastructure such as sewage treatment plants and septic tanks to be well maintained in line with their respected Environmental Permits and The Building Regulations 2010 (Part H).

The cyclical maintenance requirements for Cornwall Housing's private drainage systems are set out below.

5.1 Procurement and Contract Management

Contracting out works does not absolve CHL of its environmental compliance responsibilities associated with wastewater. If any contractor acting on behalf of CHL is found in breach of environmental legislation, or prosecuted by the regulator, CHL will also be held accountable.

CHL has a contract in place for the inspection and maintenance servicing schedule of all sewage treatment plants, plus a second contract for the routine emptying and desludging of all private drainage wastewater systems. These contracts are managed by the Wastewater Supervisor.

During the procurement process, all contractors should be checked to ensure they have:

- Environmental Policy in place (or commit to Cornwall Housing's policy)
- Certified Environmental Management System ISO14001 (or similar)
- Evidence of environmental training and awareness such as toolbox talks, relevant qualifications, etc.
- Waste Carriers licenses, permits and exemptions
- Waste management processes
- Pollution prevention and response processes
- No previous environmental convictions by the Environment Agency or any other environmental regulator

During the tender process, due diligence must be undertaken to ensure that the contractor is environmentally compliant before proceeding.

During the course of the contract, all contractors should be regularly checked through contract management and site inspections and audits. Any contractors removing waste or sub-contracting the removal of waste should ensure all waste documentation is sent to CHL with the appropriate invoices.

All waste documentation should be checked to ensure compliance.

The contract management information, including meeting agenda's and action trackers for private drainage is stored on Sharepoint.

Please refer to the specific Environmental Management Standard and accompanying guidance notes available on Sharepoint for further information.

Please contact the Environmental Compliance Manager for further advice and support.

5.2 Health & Safety

5.3 Inspection and Maintenance Service Schedule

CHL has a contract in place for the inspection and maintenance servicing schedule of all sewage treatment plants. The inspection and servicing schedule is saved on Sharepoint.

The inspections and service schedule should be undertaken by the contractor following the programmed schedule supplied by CHL. The inspection and servicing schedule, unless agreed otherwise must be completed and the full report provided within 10 working days by the contractor to CHL. For ad hoc inspections CHL may require a faster response dependent on the particular situation.

For emergency inspections and breakdowns, the Contractor must attend within 24 hours (not subject to normal working hours), provide a verbal update to CHL within an hour, and provide the full report within 48 hours of the original notification.

CHL will provide the contractor with the site list detailing the Next Due Dates of attendance for all planned visits each month. The planned visit should be completed by the Next Due Date or within the required month at the latest.

If the site requires an empty/desludge as part of the works, CHL's approved contractor should be contacted in the first instance to arrange any emptying / desludging in line with inspection, servicing or maintenance requirements.

If CHL's contractor is not available, an alternative approved licensed contractor may be sought for the emptying of sewage treatment plants ensuring the work is carried out in accordance with the Code of Practice published by British Water and Section 34 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and any subsequent amendment.

Where a planned visit is not achievable by the Next Due Date or Due Month due to unforeseen circumstances i.e., extreme weathers, the Contractor should notify the Wastewater Supervisor immediately and advise on the proposed date of re-attendance.

Once completed, the contractor sends the inspection and maintenance reports to CHL. Each report is checked and actioned accordingly. All reports should be saved in the site compliance record on Sharepoint.

Once all site inspection reports have been checked and saved, payment is released.

5.4 Emptying and Desludging

CHL has a contract in place for the routine emptying and desludging of all systems. The emptying and desludge schedule is saved on Sharepoint.

The emptying and desludging schedule should be undertaken by the contractor following the programmed schedule supplied by CHL. The schedule, unless agreed otherwise must be completed and the full report provided within 10 working days by the contractor to CHL.

For emergency inspections, the Contractor must attend within 24 hours (not subject to normal working hours), provide a verbal update to CHL within an hour, and provide the full report within 48 hours of the original notification.

At each site, the contractor should complete a site inspection form to document the visit and highlight any issues onsite which require action such as access issues, fencing, evidence of surcharging manholes, etc.

5.5 Waste Documentation

Waste documentation should be provided by the contractor for the removal of sewage sludge. Waste Transfer/Consignment Notes should be submitted for every empty /desludge and checked against the compliance checklist on Sharepoint. If any waste transfer notes are incorrectly completed, these should be returned to the contractor to ensure correct and legal waste documentation is provided before payment is made.

Waste document compliance should be on the standing

Waste transfer notes for sewage sludge should be kept on file for two years. All waste transfer notes for private drainage systems are saved on SharePoint in the site folders.

5.6 Remote Telemetry

CHL wastewater assets do not yet have telemetry systems programmed to call the Contractor in the event of an alarm condition.

All telemetry systems should be able to be interrogated to determine if the system is operative or can, in the event of an alarm call, be interrogated to determine if for example, the power supply has come back on after a short / loss of power.

Once installed, the Contractor will be required to monitor the telemetry and respond as required. The Contractor will be required to decide if the system needs an immediate response, or if it could be left to the next day if, say a call was received on a Sunday it could wait until the Monday.

On receiving a call, CHL should be notified by email indicating the action proposed / taken with evidence provided of the telemetry alert message. The Contractor is required to take the requisite action to keep the system operative confirming to CHL what was done and what further work is required.

As part of the maintenance programme the Contractor is required to monitor the telemetry system on a weekly basis; this should be invoiced on a monthly basis with evidence of the monitoring to be provided when submitting the invoice for CHL records and evidence of completion.

5.7 Wastewater Effluent Sampling

The systems require routine effluent sampling to ensure they are working as they should and to monitor the systems do not breach the Environmental permit discharge consent requirements.

Effluent sampling must be undertaken in line with CHL's sampling schedule.

The samples should be analysed by an accredited laboratory determining levels of BOD Suspended Solids, PH and Ammoniacal Nitrogen (Ammonia) by a laboratory that has a valid UKAS accreditation to ISO 17025.

The sample results are to be forwarded to CHL where they will be stored and monitored.

5.8 Vegetation Management

CHL must ensure all sites are well maintained to allow access for contractors throughout the year, vegetation maintenance contracts should be in place to manage this.

Attention should be paid to the time of year of maintenance to ensure no bird nests or other protected species are impacted as a result of maintenance works.

Attention should also be paid to sites within known invasive or harmful species such as Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam or Giant Hogweed to ensure the appropriate actions and personal protective clothing is worn to prevent harm.

Please refer to the Biodiversity Management Standard.

6. POLLUTION PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

On receiving an emergency callout from a resident, member of the public, Environment Agency, or a telemetry system, CHL should respond immediately to a system failure in order to prevent the uncontrolled release (or pollution incident) of sewage into a watercourse or onto land.

If any of the emergency call out's cause pollution of sewage debris into land or water, including resident's gardens, CHL should send a clean-up team to ensure the site is cleansed and sanitised.

The following situations may result in a pollution incident.

6.2 Septic Tank Overflow

If a septic tank is not emptied according to the schedule, the tank may overflow and back up to the nearest inspection cover and begin surcharging sewage and wastewater onto the surrounding land.

If this situation occurs, the emptying / desludge contractor should be called to attend immediately as an emergency call out to carry out an emergency empty.

6.3 Sewage Treatment Plant Failure

If a sewage treatment plant fails, the process treating the sewage will stop and the site is at risk of discharging untreated sewage and wastewater to land or water.

If this situation occurs, the servicing and maintenance contractor should be called to attend immediately to resolve the issue as soon as possible.

6.4 Sewage Pump Station Failure

If a sewage pumping station fails, the servicing and maintenance contractor should be called immediately to resolve the issue as soon as possible.

6.5 Out of Hours

The out of hours team should contact the following contractors on behalf of Cornwall Housing.

Drainage blockage – Aqua Rod 01209 861099

Septic Tank overflow – Aqua Rod 01209 861099

Sewage Treatment plant failure – ALRO / Premier Water Solutions

Sewage pump station failure – ALRO / Premier Water Solutions

Retrospective purchase orders for Out of Hours attendance will be organised and provided through the Compliance Team.

6.6 Reporting to the Environment Agency

If any sites which hold an Environmental Permit fail, break down or are not operating as they should, the Environment Agency needs to be notified, quoting the permit number, the problem and providing a report on what CHL has done to rectify the problem.

Likewise, if any pollution has occurred for any site, regardless of whether it holds an Environmental Permit or not, the Environment Agency should be notified using the 24-hour pollution hotline 0800 80 70 60. When reporting the pollution incident to the Environment Agency, you must ensure you report what CHL has done to remedy the problem and clean up any pollution caused.

Urgent pollution incidents can be reported on the Environment Agency's 24-hr hotline: 0800 80 70 60.

Please refer to the specific Pollution Prevention Management Standard and accompanying guidance notes available on Sharepoint for further information and make sure any pollution is also reported to the Environmental Compliance Manager.

7. COMMUNICATION WITH RESIDENTS

The private drainage systems provide a service for both tenants and private freeholders, and therefore both groups of people should be kept up to date.

Tenants and freeholders should be informed of any upcoming visits from contractors in advance if it requires contractors coming onto their property to access the drainage system.

7.1 Tenants

Tenants are charged a flat rate for cyclical maintenance costs, although tenants who have taken on a CHL property more recently may be charged an additional rate for the emptying and servicing of the system. This charged is capped. Please contact the Income Team for further information.

7.2 Freeholders

All freehold properties which benefit from private drainage should be recharged all cyclical and capital replacement costs by CHL for the benefit of using the drainage system.

Most freeholders have a clause included within their conveyance documents which require them to contribute to the "repair, renewal and maintenance of the drainage".

These documents are saved on SharePoint under the site records. If the conveyances are not accessible, these can be requested through the Legal team.

7.3 Information for Residents

Guidance leaflets have been created to encourage both tenants and private freeholders which benefit from a private drainage system to use them correctly. Please refer to the appendices.

8. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Anyone working on behalf of CHL has a duty to in accordance with the principals this standard.

- **Directors & Heads of Services**
  - Ensuring the principles of this standard are followed within areas of responsibility.
  - Ensuring suitable and sufficient resources are available and allocated to prevent pollution in accordance with legislation and industry best practice.

- **Environmental Compliance Manager**
  - Providing technical support
  - Monitoring, reviewing, and reporting performance.

- **Procurement**
- Overseeing contractor performance, engagement, and communication.

- **Wastewater Supervisor**
- Managing operations in a way that prevents harm to both people and the environment.
- Developing suitable and sufficient risk assessments and method statements for work activities.
- Communicating risks, methods and expectations to operatives and contractors.
- Escalating and reporting all environmental issues, incidents, and near-misses in a timely manner.
- Managing the Wastewater Contracts
- Liaising with residents

- **Operatives & Other Employees**:
- Working to the standards and expectations outlined by the site supervisor or site manager.
- Undertaking activities as instructed in accordance with risk assessments and method statements.
- Reporting all complaints, incidents and near-misses to supervisors and managers as soon as possible.

- **Contractors & Suppliers**
  - Preventing harm to people or the environment and working in accordance with the standards and expectations outlined by CHL.

9. TRAINING AND COMPETENCY

CHL is committed to developing, maintaining, and deploying competent personnel to support its activities.

10. INTERESTED PARTIES

Key regulatory bodies for private drainage systems include:

- **Environment Agency (EA)**

This executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has responsibility for regulating most flood risk, waste management and pollution related activities (including oil storage and water discharge).

- **South West Water (SWW)**

Water companies have statutory duties to supply drinking water and waste water services to their customers and to ensure effective drainage within their areas.

- **Local Authority (Cornwall Council)**

In addition to overseeing 'Land Drainage Consents' for activities impacting 'ordinary watercourses', local authorities also have statutory duties for ensuring that noise, dust, odour, and litter is controlled.

Other interested parties may potentially include Contractors, Conservation Groups, local residents

11. MONITORING AND REPORTING

11.1 Near Misses and Incidents

CHL's definition of non-compliance is "any incident which has the potential to result in a potential breach of legislation or regulatory standard, or which causes a risk to the environment". All non-compliance issues will be reported and escalated as soon as possible, and no later than 24 hours after the incident occurred or becoming aware of it.

Any non-compliance issue identified at an operational level will be formally reported to the Head of Asset Management in the first instance, who will agree an appropriate course of corrective action with the Environmental Compliance Manager and report details of the same to the ELT.

In cases of serious non-compliance, ELT and CHL Board will consider whether it is necessary to disclose the issue to Council, prior to a disclosure to the Regulator or any other relevant organisation such as the Health and Safety Executive.

Trends and root causes will be analysed to ensure effective corrective action which prevents reoccurrence.

All private drainage near misses and incidents must be recorded on the internal incident reporting system Entropy

Near Miss:	Incident:
Event which happened but did not cause environmental harm or damage.	Event which happened and resulted in environmental harm or damage.

11.2 Audits and Inspections

Documented internal audits and inspections will be undertaken by the environmental compliance team, operational managers, and site supervisors. All business areas will be reviewed at least annually, with additional oversight for higher risk activities or locations.

Regular third-party audits will additionally take place. CHL reserves the right to undertake audits of external contractors.

11.3 Key Performance Indicators

CHL will report comprehensive key performance indicators (KPIs) for environmental management. The Senior Leadership Team will be notified on a monthly basis of the following.

- No. of environmental non-conformities
- No. of environmental incidents and near misses

CHL will report annual data on the following waste key performance indicators:

Indicator	Metric
No. of pollution incidents	
No. of permit breaches	

12. DOCUMENT REVIEW

This document may be reviewed at any time at the request of either staff or management but will automatically be reviewed twelve months from initial approval unless organisational changes, legislation, guidance or non-compliance prompt an earlier review.

13. APPENDIX – ADVICE NOTES

The following advice leaflets have been produced for residents to encourage the correct use of the wastewater systems.

- Septic tank leaflet
- Sewage treatment system leaflet
- Sewage pumping station leaflet