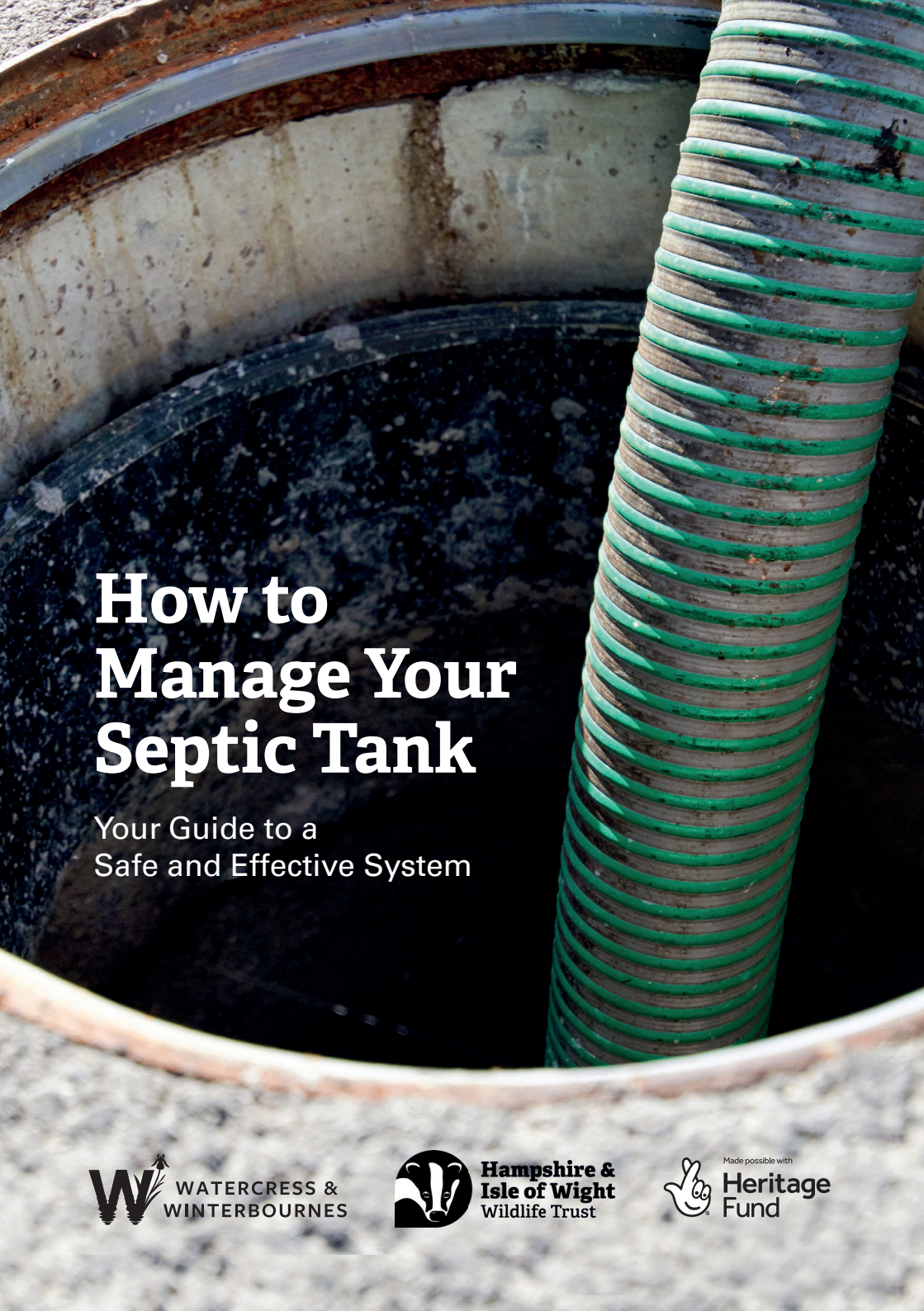

How to Manage Your Septic Tank

Your Guide to a Safe and Effective System

WATERCRESS & WINTERBOURNES

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

Made possible with Heritage Fund

Did you know?

If your home uses a cesspit, septic tank, or sewage treatment plant, you have an 'off-mains' sewage system. **But did you know that mismanaging it could damage both your property and the natural environment?**

This is especially serious in Hampshire, where pollutants can reach the chalk aquifer - the source of our chalk streams and most of our drinking water. As an off-mains user, you have a crucial role in preventing this.

When working well, off-mains systems aren't a cause for concern. Unfortunately, there are many ways that faults can occur, from tree roots and ground movement to preventable causes like insufficient maintenance.

Despite being in the minority, off-mains homes can have an enormous impact on their local area. If something goes wrong, the resulting pollution can have terrible consequences for people and wildlife.

How it works

In all off-mains systems, the waste naturally separates into sludge, water, and scum - a process aided by bacteria breaking down the waste for energy. Beyond this, the three system types vary in how they function.

1.

Cesspits, or cesspools, simply contain the waste until the tank is emptied. Because no wastewater is discharged, they need emptying more often. They tend to only be used when other system types aren't suitable.

2.

In septic tanks, the separation process repeats in a second chamber. Wastewater then flows into a drainage field for further filtration; it cannot be discharged into a watercourse. The sludge and scum are emptied manually.

3.

Sewage treatment plants introduce oxygen via a motor. Because the waste is treated more effectively, these systems can discharge into a drainage field or a watercourse. The sludge and scum are emptied manually.

Nature in peril

Our local chalk streams are some of **nature's rarest gems.** Found almost nowhere else on Earth, their 'gin-clear' waters are **precious havens** for the kingfisher, water vole, brown trout, and white-clawed crayfish.

Unfortunately, sewage can **seriously harm these habitats.** Rich in phosphorus and nitrogen - highly effective fertilisers - it boosts the growth of algae, triggering blooms that **rob the streams of sunlight and oxygen.**

The result is a **dramatic loss of biodiversity.** Without sunlight, many aquatic plants will perish. Insect and fish species that need high levels of oxygen to thrive will **fail to breed and ultimately suffocate.**

Know the law

If your home uses an off-mains sewage system, you must follow some '**general binding rules**' or risk enforcement action. These can be complex, but here are our top tips:

1.

Manage your discharges: Depending on your system's location and the volume of its discharges, you may need a permit. The discharges must not cause pollution.

2.

Use the right system: Your system and drainage field must be suitable for your use, and meet the relevant British Standard for when they were installed.

3.

Empty your system regularly: How often will depend on its type, its size, and the number of people using it. Seek guidance from a specialist company.

4.

Maintain your system regularly: The manufacturer or a specialist company can suggest a maintenance schedule. Any faults must be repaired immediately.

5.

Notify new owners: If you sell your home, you must inform the buyer about your system in writing and provide maintenance records if possible.

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It's important to understand your legal responsibilities, so we recommend checking the full details at:

www.gov.uk/small-sewage-rules

Look for problems

Checking, emptying, and maintaining your system regularly will help you to find and fix faults early on.

Look out for:

1. Sinks, showers, and toilets **draining slowly** or **noisily**.
2. **Foul smells** either inside or outside your home.
3. **Swampy ground** or **pooling water** near the system.
4. Areas of **lush grass growth** near the system.
5. A **grey**, **fluffy film** on the ground near the system.
6. **Dark**, **thick**, or **smelly waste** around the discharge pipe.
7. A **leaking** tank lid, vent, or manhole cover.

If in doubt, seek advice from a specialist company.
It's also good to keep detailed records of your system's maintenance history, as this can be useful if faults arise.

What not to flush

Your system receives everything that goes down your drains, and adding the **wrong things** is a leading cause of faults.

Some can block pipes and clog drainage fields.
Pop these in the bin instead:

Fat, oil, and grease

Food waste

Cat litter

Cotton buds

Nappies and sanitary towels

Wipes (even 'flushable' ones)

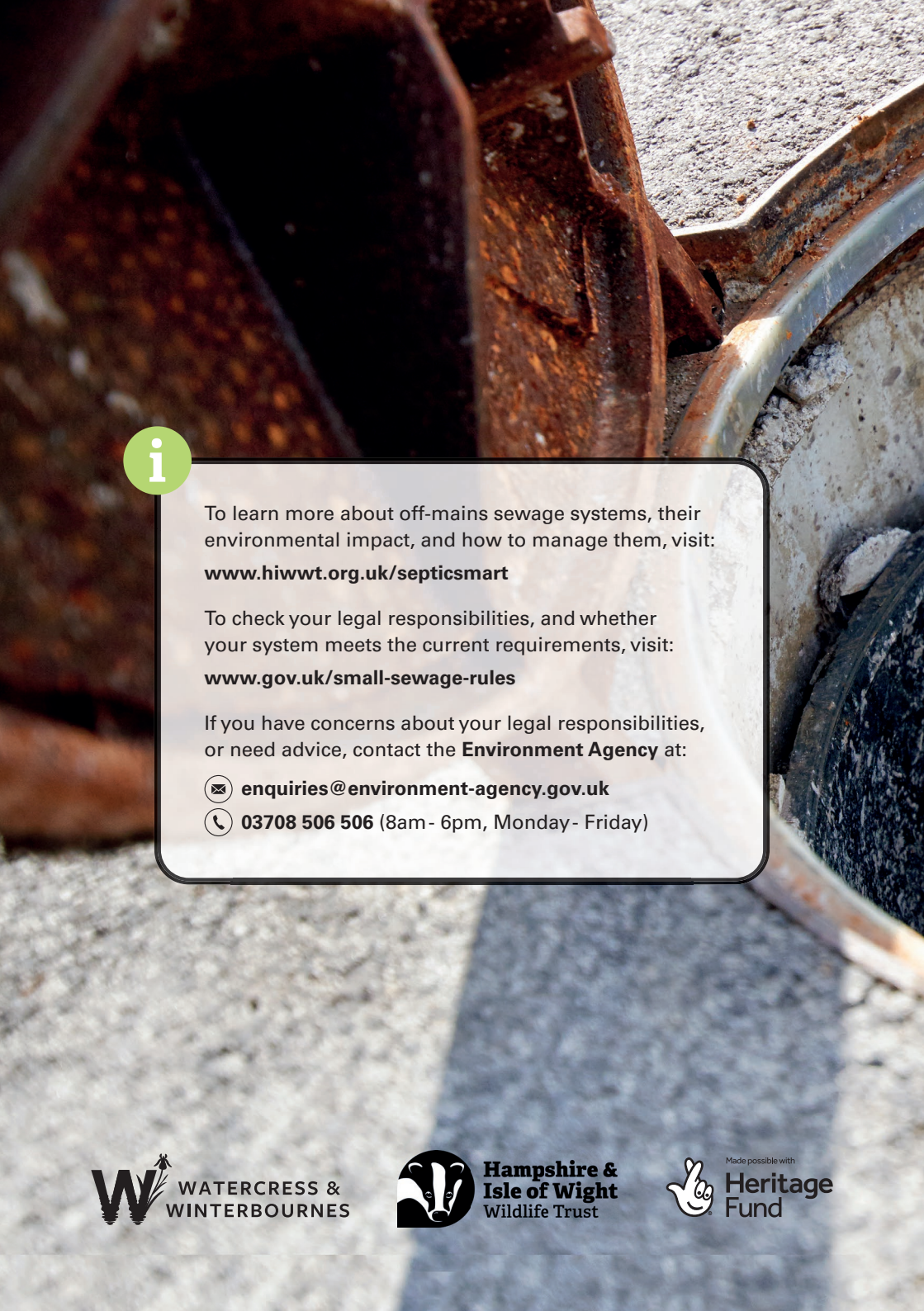
Others can kill waste-digesting bacteria. Learn how to dispose of these safely at **www.hiwwt.org.uk/septicsmart**:

Medicines, disinfectants, and antibacterial products

Houseplant and garden pesticides

Bleach, caustic soda, and drain cleaner*

*Look for products that say 'safe for septic tanks'



To learn more about off-mains sewage systems, their environmental impact, and how to manage them, visit:

www.hiwwt.org.uk/septicsmart

To check your legal responsibilities, and whether your system meets the current requirements, visit:

www.gov.uk/small-sewage-rules

If you have concerns about your legal responsibilities, or need advice, contact the **Environment Agency** at:

enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

03708 506 506 (8am - 6pm, Monday - Friday)

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