

Answered by Steve Moir, partner of Hennings Moir, **team** estate agent in Saltash (01752 850440) and chairman of Westcountry **team**...



**Q. My property has private drainage in the form of a septic tank. I have lived with it perfectly happily for over 20 years, but someone recently told me that I now have to register the system. Is this true?**

**A.** In a word, yes – unless you already hold a ‘Consent to Discharge’, or an Environmental Permit.

The fact is that under the snappily-titled Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010, all septic tanks and other private sewage treatment plants, no matter how long they have been in use, must now be properly authorised – either by an environmental permit, or through an exemption. Domestic systems, such as your septic tank, will generally qualify for an exemption, as long as the amount of discharge is less than 2 cubic metres a day (roughly the amount of sewage generated by up to 11 people).

If your system discharges into a river or stream, then you must register immediately. If, on the other hand, it discharges into the ground – for example, via a drainage field, reed bed or straightforward soakaway – then you have until 31<sup>st</sup> December this year to do so. Bear in mind, however, that if you leave it until the very last possible date to register, and the discharge from your system is in an environmentally sensitive area, then you may face a delay of up to 4 months – which means that in the meantime you will urgently need an environmental permit in order to stay on the right side of the law. And this is no joke. After 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012, any discharge from an unregistered system will be treated as a case of illegal pollution - a serious offence which could result in a fine of up to £20,000.

Thankfully, registration is a relatively simple process, which can be completed free of charge online by visiting the Environment Agency website, [www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk).

However, it doesn't end there. Once registered, you will also have to ensure that your system is regularly inspected and maintained – and that proper records are kept. This will be important if and when you come to sell your property, since your buyer's solicitor will want to confirm that the system is fully compliant with the regulations.

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