

Information Management Unit
IT Suite
Westland House
40 Old Westland Road
Belfast
BT14 6TE

Tel: 03457 440088

Email: imu@niwater.com

Your reference:

Our reference: NIW 2425622

Date: 20 March 2025

Dear [REDACTED]

Environmental Information Regulations 2004

Thank you for your email of 19 March 2025 requesting Information pertaining to septic tank de-sludging by NI Water, both in the Lough Neagh area and across Northern Ireland.

As your queries fall under the definition of requests for environmental information, NI Water is replying under the disclosure provisions of the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) 2004.

NI Water will answer each question in turn below:

- 1) The number of septic tanks emptied within the Lough Neagh catchment area annually between 2015 and the present day.*

As a public authority, NI Water is obliged to inform an applicant as soon as possible (and within 20 working days or receipt) if a request is too general or unclear. Under

Regulation 9 of the EIR, NI Water must also provide advice and assistance to the applicant to help them formulate a valid request.

After considering your request, I wish to advise you that, in its present form, it does not fully describe the information sought. It would be helpful if you could please specify exactly what you mean by “within the Lough Neagh catchment area”. NI Water does not store septic tank de-sludge data by catchment area and the Company would require specific postcodes to be able to search our systems for this information.

Pending such clarification, the Company cannot confirm whether the information is held. Therefore, NI Water seeks to rely on Regulation 12(4)(c) of the EIR (the request is formulated in too general a manner). This link to the Information Commissioner’s Office’s [guidance on this Regulation](#) may assist.

All exceptions under the EIR are qualified and so, in deciding whether to disclose the requested information, NI Water must consider the public interest. However, this is not possible where it is not known what the required information is and whether it is held by NI Water.

In the interim, NI Water is unable to proceed with your request until we receive a greater degree of precision/clarification of the information you wish to receive. Please note that the 20-working-day time limit will begin again if clarification is received.

Please note, any results will be specific to the last two to three years, not ten years as requested, due to system limitations and, even on refinement of your request, through the provision of specific postcodes, compliance may still be considered unreasonable, given the format in which NI Water retains private septic tank requests (i.e., held against the accounts of private customers). If this is the case, NI Water will advise you by return.

2) The number of septic tanks emptied across Northern Ireland annually between 2015 and the present day.

Private Septic Tanks

The only details NI Water retains regarding private septic tanks are those where a septic tank de-sludge/empty has been requested. To assist you, we are providing de-sludge numbers for same, but there may be properties with private septic tanks that are connected to the public sewage system, that NI Water is not aware of.

For a reliable count of and locations of private septic tanks, NI Water would recommend you contact the NIEA which regulates private septic tanks.

- <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/contacts/northern-ireland-environment-agency-contact>
- <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/domestic-consent-public-register>

Please refer to Annex A. Please note that numbers are only available up to the end of February 2025.

NI Water also has a number of Septic Tanks, including several close to Lough Neagh.

Council Area	WwTW Installation Type	Number
Antrim and Newtownabbey	Septic Tank	32
Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon	Septic Tank	39
Belfast	Septic Tank	4
Causeway Coast and Glens	Septic Tank	66
Derry and Strabane	Septic Tank	33
Fermanagh and Omagh	Septic Tank	11
Lisburn and Castlereagh	Septic Tank	10
Mid and East Antrim	Septic Tank	11
Mid Ulster	Septic Tank	64
Newry Mourne and Down	Septic Tank	40
North Down and Ards	Septic Tank	49
Total		359

- 3) *Any figures (either estimates or total calculated) on how much this work costs NI Water per year - for both the Lough Neagh catchment and across Northern Ireland as a whole.*

Please refer to Annex A which refers to across Northern Ireland as a whole. As detailed above, NI Water does not hold this information in terms of catchment areas and so, we cannot provide the information broken down to the Lough Neagh catchment, which as detailed at Point 1, has not been defined.

The costs are only available to the end of February 2025 at this time, and NI Water does not expect to receive March's costs until April. These costs should not be interpreted as being the cost per de-sludge, but rather an aggregated cost for all aspects of the contract. Costs of each de-sludge vary, depending on the type of tank, the urgency of the request, difficulty of access, etc. The cost to NI Water per de-sludge cannot be discerned from the information in Annex A.

- 4) *Copies of any reports produced by the NI Water on the same during this time.*

As above on Point 1, I wish to advise you that, in its present form, it does not fully describe the information sought. It would be helpful if you could please specify exactly what kind of report your referring to, or perhaps in what capacity you would expect NI Water to hold such a report.

Pending such clarification, the Company cannot confirm whether the information is held.

You have the right to request that NI Water formally review this response within forty working days of the date of this letter. If you wish to do so, please email imu@niwater.com or write to NI Water Information Management Unit, IT Suite, Westland House, 40 Old Westland Road, Belfast, BT14 6TE.

If, after such an internal review, you are still unhappy with the response, you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, CHESHIRE, SK9 5AF, who will undertake an independent review.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact us. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely

Information Management Unit
Northern Ireland Water

Annex A

Year	No. of tanks	Annual spend
2015/16	33923	£1,056,978.53
2016/17	36330	£1,123,824.91
2017/18	35653	£1,104,116.42
2018/19	38569	£1,260,891.87
2019/20	38953	£1,351,663.42
2020/21	43079	£1,609,236.35
2021/22	41601	£1,537,374.23
2022/23	41043	£1,618,554.81
2023/24	43075	£1,834,203.94
2024/25*	42634	£1,825,849.16

The cost to NI Water per de-sludge cannot be discerned from above