



Proposed national wastewater environmental performance standard

Planning, monitoring, and reporting for overflows and bypasses

What are overflows and bypasses?

Overflows happen when untreated or partially treated wastewater spills from a wastewater network into the environment.

Overflows are commonly caused by things like blockages (e.g. from fat or wet wipes), rainwater entering pipes, population growth increasing pressure on a wastewater network, or wastewater equipment breakdowns.

Bypasses happen when untreated or partially treated wastewater is diverted from a wastewater treatment plant that has exceeded its capacity during heavy rainfall and is released into the environment. Bypasses are built into the wastewater network to prevent sensitive treatment plant equipment from being damaged during heavy rain.

Overflows and bypasses are inevitable. In the 2021/22 financial year, the [Water New Zealand National Performance Review](#) reported a total of 3,121 overflows across New Zealand.

Wastewater networks are particularly vulnerable to very heavy rain caused by severe weather events. So overflows and bypasses are likely to become more common as climate change increases the number of these events.

The opportunity

Overflows can pose a risk to public health and the environment. They can impact communities' ability to swim or gather food as well as the health of plants and animals.

Right now, the approach to reporting on wastewater overflows varies across the country. Data is generally low quality or has gaps, making it difficult to understand wastewater network performance nationally.

A critical first step toward reducing overflows is to ensure consistent monitoring and reporting practices provide quality data and information that make local and national performance transparent.

Making wastewater performance transparent will enable individual wastewater network operators, as well as the sector as a whole, to see what's working and identify opportunities to make improvements that reduce overflows over time.



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What this proposed standard covers

This proposed standard would:

- require all existing controlled overflow points and treatment plant bypasses to have a consent under the Resource Management Act 1991
- set specific requirements for monitoring and reporting of overflows from the network or treatment plant bypass, based on the risk to public health and how often an overflow occurs.

The discussion document also proposes that all wastewater networks would be required to have a wastewater risk management plan.

Proposed standards would only apply to public networks, which are primarily owned and operated by local councils. They do not apply to privately-owned wastewater treatment networks or septic tanks.

Enabled by proposed legislative changes

The Local Government (Water Services) Bill proposes to amend the Water Services Act 2021 and Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) to enable us to set activity statuses under the RMA for a range of activities, including overflows and bypasses.

Subject to this Bill being enacted, this standard proposes to make existing overflow points in a wastewater network, together with treatment plant bypasses, a 'controlled' activity. This means local councils would have to get resource consents for all overflows and bypasses from their wastewater networks. In turn, this would enable nationally consistent planning, monitoring and reporting practices to be put in place through consistent conditions.

These steps would make wastewater performance more transparent so communities, network operators and the sector as a whole can see what's working and where there might be opportunities to improve.

Wastewater risk management plans

The discussion document also proposes that all public wastewater networks would be required to have a wastewater risk management plan. These plans would be required through existing powers under the Water Services Act. At a high level, these plans would ensure network operators:

- examine their networks and treatment plants
- identify risks and hazards
- create a plan to manage these risks.

These plans would be based on network performance modelling and engagement with communities that might be impacted by overflows or bypasses.

We would set requirements for what network operators must include in the overflow section of these plans. We expect this could include:

- a map of controlled and uncontrolled overflow points across a network
- a list of all overflow points in the network that are categorised based on a risk framework
- the details of any bypasses for a wastewater treatment plant
- how the network operator plans to manage, control, monitor or eliminate risks.

Monitoring and reporting

Monitoring requirements would depend on the type of overflow point. However, as a minimum, network operators would be required to have telemetric (continuous) monitoring at:

- all engineered overflow points (typically found at pump stations or storage tanks) that are classified as high risk
- all new overflow points and pump stations as they are built
- all uncontrolled (i.e. burst pipe or manhole cover) overflow points where overflows happen often.

Reporting would be separated into 'first response' and 'follow-up' reporting.

- First response reporting is the information required to support the public health of the community impacted by the overflow.
- Follow-up reporting shows how the overflow was managed over time. This includes an assessment of the public health and environmental impact of the overflow.

We will develop guidance to support the implementation of all four standards.

Find out more, and have your say

Visit korero.taumataarowai.govt.nz/regulatory/wastewater-standards to find out more and provide feedback.

There you'll find:

- more resources like this
- the full consultation discussion document, which contains detailed information on what's proposed

- the technical reports and research that helped to inform proposed standards
- how to submit your feedback online, via email, or via post.

Consultation closes at **5pm on Thursday, 24 April 2025** (note that Friday 25 April is Anzac Day).

If you have questions about the proposed standards, please contact us at: korero@taumataarowai.govt.nz