

Water Tactics - Press release 12/3/09

Urban rainwater storage. Will we lose our rainwater tanks again?

Back in the 1960's, some Queensland Councils banned urban rainwater tanks largely due to the potential health risks when mosquitoes were found to be breeding in the tanks. Tanks are once again part of the urban landscape but will we learn from the lessons of the past?

The recent extended drought and Government rebate schemes resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of rainwater tank installations in the Brisbane metropolitan area. Yet very little has really been done to make the public aware of the necessity to properly maintain them to ensure efficient operation, longevity but most importantly, water quality and hygiene.

Water Tactics provide rainwater tank maintenance and cleaning services. Here is just a sample of some of the cases they have dealt with lately:

- First-flush devices blocked and harbouring mosquitoes
- Incorrectly fitted inlet strainers allowing gaps for mosquito entry
- Poor installation allowing possums and toads to enter and die in tanks
- Possum drowned in tank 'wet system' pipe
- Vegetation breakdown tainting water with tannins
- Roof cleaning operation washing debris into tank resulting in putrid water
- D-I-Y tank maintenance not re-securing fittings resulting in mosquito entry
- Deliberate removal of overflow strainers to avoid blockage but allowing mosquito entry
- Midge populations surviving underwater
- Blocked inlet and overflow strainers causing overflow from top & base subsidence
- Subsiding tank bases causing tanks to lean and fittings to crack.
- Positioning of tanks on inappropriate tank stands, risking collapse

Disturbingly, some of these cases have been in very public areas, for example community health centres and child care facilities.

Jim Steel, director of Water Tactics says "I'm dealing with some serious problems with rainwater tanks which could be avoided with regular maintenance. People have done the right thing and invested in water saving measures, but if tanks are not maintained properly they can become a health risk". Like any property investment, regular maintenance is required to avoid costly correction work.

Water conservation through rainwater storage and use is not only environmentally responsible but also saves money and allows freedom to use an alternative water source in case of mains water restrictions. If we want to be able to continue harvesting this precious natural resource in our cities, we need to heed the lessons of the past.

Mosquitoes can, and do, breed in rainwater tanks but only where the installation or the maintenance is sub-standard. We need to take the issue of rainwater tank hygiene seriously, especially considering the recent outbreaks of Dengue fever in Northern Queensland. And if that isn't motivation enough, did you know that you can actually be fined if mosquitoes are found breeding in your tank?

Ensure your rainwater tank system is maintained regularly and undergoes a thorough inspection at least annually to avoid potential problems.