

regulations

This section covers the bodies you need to satisfy in the UK. Sorry, we have no information about circumstances in other countries, but probably the best place to start is your local authority.

But don't assume that there are lots of regulatory bodies out there who are determined to stop you having compost toilets. All contact we've had with the UK planning authorities, Building Control, Environmental Health and the Environment Agency has been positive. They just want to be sure that anything you get up to is not going to be damaging to the environment, or cause a nuisance to your neighbours. It was difficult to find anyone who had the first idea about what a compost toilet was, but when we explained, we came across nothing but support.

The Planning Department of our local authority said they have no issues at all with compost toilets, only if there is a new building or extension to house it. They advised us to talk to Building Control. Environmental Health didn't have any issues either, and didn't know anything about compost loos. They said that they were happy as long as it didn't cause a nuisance to anyone else (e.g. smells). They said that they wouldn't need to come and visit unless anyone complained, but someone from Building Control might.

Building Control locally had never heard of compost toilets, and at the time we built ours, there was no mention of them in the Building Regulations. Reed beds, septic tanks, cesspools etc were covered, but not compost toilets.

Since then, compost toilets have been mentioned for the first time, although not in much detail. No-nos are building the loo in an area that may be flooded, or having to carry the finished compost through a living or cooking area – just common sense stuff. There's also something about the use of electricity – it can only be used for ventilation or processes that help the composting process. So toilets that dessicate or incinerate the waste may be a problem – rightly so, in our opinion. Best to check with them, as regulations change.

Building Control suggested that it would be a good idea to submit a Building Control application, and then they would talk to Environmental Health. They can't stop you deciding which toilet system to use, providing you don't cause a nuisance to anyone, or do anything potentially damaging to your own health or the health of others, or to the environment. If built and used properly, then no problems should occur, and it should benefit the environment rather than damage it.

The Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999 do not apply unless there is a connection to the mains supply, which there isn't with a compost loo.

The Environment Agency actively promote compost toilets (although you'll still have a job finding anyone who knows what they are). They have a range of fact-sheets on ways to save water, including one on compost loos. They also produce guidance notes, covering septic tanks, leachfields & soakaways - and also reed beds and compost toilets briefly, both of which are mentioned in a very favourable light. Agency consent may be needed for all of the above, even if discharge is to a leachfield or a reed bed / pond system.

You may need a percolation test to install a leachfield / soakaway. Contact your local Environment Agency for more information.