Welcome to the Mt Martha Sewage Treatment Plant! Our plant is one of eight in South East Water’s service area. The work that these plants do means that the water we use everyday can be recycled or safely released back into the environment.

1. Quick facts

- Mt Martha Sewage Treatment Plant opened in 1978 and serves the townships of Mornington, Mt Eliza, Somerville, Pearcedale, Baxter and Mt Martha.
- Every day 13 million litres of sewage is treated at the plant.

2. Mt Martha Sewage Treatment Plant

3. Why do we have sewage treatment plants?

Did you know that just over 120 years ago Melbourne was sometimes called “Marvelous Smellbourne”? Back then, sewage from homes was disposed of in open gutters, flowing into rivers and creeks. You wouldn’t want to go for a swim in that!

This created an awful smell, but more importantly it was a health and environmental hazard because of the harmful bugs (bacteria) living in the sewage. The population of Melbourne was growing quickly and people needed a safer way to dispose of their waste. This led to thunderboxes being created.

Thunderboxes were small cubicles outside of homes with buckets or pans for people to do their business. A very unlucky nightman came around each week to remove the bucket, empty it and then replace it. This sewage would be gathered up, dried and used as fertiliser.

Authorities, and most likely the unlucky nightman, eventually decided a better method of sewage disposal was needed. So, in 1889 English engineer James Mansergh became a sewage superhero and created plans for Melbourne’s first ever sewerage system. The start of construction on the sewerage system began in 1892 and before too long people could walk around without holding their noses anymore!

The first treatment plant was built in Werribee and the first homes were connected to the sewer pipes in 1897. Since then more treatment plants have been built to cater for our growing population, including the one at Mt Martha!
4. What is sewage?

Sewage is the water and waste that comes from buildings. This includes waste and water from toilets, bathroom and kitchen sinks, washing machines and laundry basins. This water is very dirty and has lots of contaminants. Therefore it is important that we clean this water before we reuse it or recycle it back to the environment.

5. What happens to sewage?

Everything you send down the sink or toilet travels through underground sewer pipes to a treatment plant. South East Water has around 8,500 kilometres of sewer pipes. South East Water also has 250 sewage pumping stations situated at different points across the network that help pump the sewage towards the treatment plant.

6. Did you know?

- 99.97 per cent of the sewage that arrives at the plant is water.
- The S-bend pipes that are connected to toilets are designed to stop smelly gases from coming back up into your house. Yes, even Dad’s!
- Thunderboxes were named due to the noise the horse and cart made coming down the cobblestones in the back lanes. The last three of these in Victoria were removed from Frankston in 1991.
- It is said that the average person spends about 380 days of their life on the toilet. That’s a lot of time reading newspapers!
- The average person uses 20,805 sheets of toilet paper a year!
- One in three people in the world don’t have access to safe and sanitary toilet facilities.
- World Toilet Day is held on 19 November each year to raise awareness about the issues surrounding poor sanitation in developing countries.

7. Quick quiz

Q1. How many sewage treatment plants are there in the South East Water Service area?
Q2. How many people don’t have access to safe and sanitary toilet facilities in the world?
Q3. List three items that you shouldn’t put down the toilet or sink in the kitchen, bathroom, garden, garage or workshop.

8. More information

More information about South East Water and our sewerage network can be found at southeastwater.com.au