

Animal Entry Points 101

Water storage tanks have a history of being contaminated by animals entering into the internal areas. The local environment often dictates what sort of animal is likely to be the contamination source. The tank may be surrounded by overhanging trees, poorly maintained compound areas or be subject to vandal activity. The height of the tank above the ground is also an important issue – inground tanks are more likely to have animal access points than taller tanks.

All of these factors will be an indication of where the access to the tank may be occurring.

1. Vandal activity can cause entry and roof hatches to be left open, roof vents can be damaged or destroyed and ventilation mesh in the fascia walls can be broken or pushed in. This can leave the tank open to larger animal types such as possums, feral cats, goannas and foxes in rare cases, if the tank is inground.
2. Surrounding bushland is a natural habitat for most of the above, so the access can be enhanced by overhanging trees, unsealed hatches/vent systems and in many cases, open overflow drain points.
3. It is essential for storage tanks to have an overflow system installed and the drain point is often situated a distance from the tank and is open on the end. Overflow events are rare, so this encourages native animals to live inside a protected area. If the overflow is not too large in diameter, a rabbit, cat or snake can smell the stored water and decide to investigate. Not being 'confined space trained' they climb up the overflow riser and fall into the tank, with no effective means of escape. They then drown and contaminate the water. A simple solution is to fit a 'flapper valve' to the end of all overflow drain points and to keep the surrounding area clear of vegetation.
4. Birds are the most common bodies found inside tanks. Large bird entry is rare, but smaller birds are always looking for a safe place to live and nest, without being attacked by the larger birds. Unsealed roof edge flashings and damaged or poorly installed vent mesh are the main areas of access. Birds can either enter and nest freely within the tank or they can become entrapped and die.

Summary:

OH&S personnel should consider providing 'Confined Space' training to native animals... "don't get in if you think you cannot get out"