



TIPS FOR RESIDENTIAL HEATING OIL TANK OWNERS

Residential heating oil tanks are tanks that store fuel oil to provide space heating on premises (single and multi-family dwellings) where they are located.

With proper management of your tank, you can avoid the serious threat to public safety and the environment from spills and leaks. Leaking tanks can contaminate public and private drinking water supplies, pollute soils and create the potential for fires and explosions and subject tank owners to very expensive cleanup costs.

This fact sheet provides tips on how to maintain residential heating oil tanks and what actions to take in the event of spills or leaks.

How can heating oil tanks be protected from spills?

1. **ROUTINELY INSPECT THE EXTERIOR OF AN ABOVEGROUND HEATING OIL TANK.** Often, leaks can easily be detected and corrected before extensive environmental damage occurs.

Aboveground tanks can collapse when the tank legs rust or the soil underneath settles due to the freezing and thawing cycle. To prevent such collapses, aboveground tanks should be inspected for structural soundness such as weak or unsteady support legs and be placed on a secure foundation. Some solutions include putting the tank on floor flanges with concrete anchors or putting the tank on a concrete pad instead of on the ground. **Remember**, a 275 gallon tank full of fuel oil weighs over one ton.

Aboveground tanks also need to be inspected for corrosion (rust), holes, leaking pipes and loose joints. They need to be placed in a secure area, such as away from vehicle traffic or other objects that can damage the tank.

2. **INSTALL SPILL AND OVERFILL PREVENTION DEVICES.** Spills and overfills occur when product is delivered to the tank. There are simple and generally inexpensive devices that can be installed on tanks to prevent this from occurring. Your product distributor can advise you about available devices.

Is it important to remove the fill pipe when a tank is removed?

Yes. There are documented cases of fuel being delivered through fill pipes for basement tanks that no longer existed. The owners failed to notify their distributors of their tanks being removed and because the fill pipes were still in place, the distributors delivered product according to their routine delivery schedule.

Self Inspection Checklist for Basement and Backyard Aboveground Home Heating Oil Tanks

If you answer "YES" to any of the following questions, call your oil burner technician for a more detailed inspection and corrective measures.

- Are the tank legs unstable or on a precarious foundation?
- Are there any signs of rust, weeps, wet spots or excessive dents on the tank's surface?
- Are there any drips or signs of leakage around the filter or valves?
- Do the oil lines between the tank and the furnace run either under concrete or aboveground without being encased in protective tubing?
- Is there danger of snow or ice falling on the tank?
- Is the tank vent clogged or restricted because of ice, snow or insect nests? (Screened vents can be used to prevent insect nest problems.)
- Is the overfill whistle silent when the tank is being filled? (Ask your delivery person.)
- Are there signs of spills around the fill pipe or the vent pipe?
- Is the fuel-level gauge cracked, stuck or frozen...or are there signs of oil around it?
- Are you using more oil than normal?

**Self Inspection Checklist for
Home Heating Oil
Underground Storage Tanks (USTs)**

If you answer "YES" to any of the following questions, call your oil burner technician for a more detailed inspection and corrective measures.

- Are you using more fuel than normal?
- Is your tank taking on water - a rise in water level greater than ½" for an 8- to 12-hour period? (Your oil-burner technician can check for water or provide you with water-finding paste so you can check yourself.)
- Is the tank vent clogged or restricted because of ice, snow, or insect nests? (Screened vents can be used to prevent insect nest problems.)
- Is the overfill whistle silent when the tank is being filled? (Ask your delivery person.)

Are there indicators that a residential heating oil tank might be leaking or product has been spilled?

Yes. There are many indicators, including:

- soil is saturated with heating oil;
- soil or other surface material around the fillpipe is stained;
- product vapors are in the soils or in the basement area;
- fuel is seeping into a basement, stream, underground utility, etc.;
- drinking water supplies are contaminated;
- fuel consumption has suddenly increased;
- furnace is operating erratically;
- neighbors are complaining of fuel oil odors.

What must you do if a residential heating oil tank leaks?

- ✓ Identify the source of the release. If you can't find the source, you may need to contact a professional to test the tank and/or piping system to locate the area of the release.
- ✓ Stop or contain the release. Absorbent material like cat litter can help stop the release from spreading. Call a professional, such as your product distributor, to remove as much product from the tank as necessary to prevent further release.

✓ Report the release to DEP. You are required under state environmental laws to notify the appropriate regional DEP office of spills and to take immediate actions to contain the spill. Other corrective action measures also may be necessary. (Your local or county government offices also may have reporting requirements.)

✓ Begin cleanup. Contact professionals to help determine the extent of contamination, prepare a cleanup plan and clean up the site. The cost and quality of work can vary greatly. For information on how to hire contractors, ask for DEP's storage tank fact sheet #5. (Owners may want to first notify their private insurance company before hiring a contractor because the costs may be covered. Furthermore, some insurance companies want to approve a contractor first as part of their policy.)

It is the responsibility of the tank/property owner to initiate and complete all necessary corrective action measures. For information on DEP's cleanup standards contact one of DEP's regional offices.

✓ Keep detailed and accurate records. It is very important to keep records of cleanup action plans and actions taken.

Regional DEP Offices:

Southeast Region

Lee Park, Suite 6010
555 N. Lane
Conshohocken, PA 19428
610-832-5949

Counties: Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia

Southwest Region

400 Waterfront Drive
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
412-442-4000

Counties: Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Cambria, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Somerset, Washington and Westmoreland

Northcentral Region

208 West 3rd Street, Suite 101
Williamsport, PA 17701
570-321-6525

Counties: Bradford, Cameron, Centre, Clearfield, Clinton, Columbia, Lycoming, Montour, Northumberland, Potter, Snyder, Sullivan, Tioga and Union

Northeast Region

2 Public Square
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711-0790
570-826-5475

Counties: Carbon, Lackawanna, Lehigh, Luzerne, Monroe, Northampton, Pike, Schuylkill, Susquehanna, Wayne & Wyoming

Southcentral Region

909 Elmerton Avenue
Harrisburg, PA 17110
717-705-4700

Counties: Adams, Bedford, Berks, Blair, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lancaster, Lebanon, Mifflin, Perry and York

Northwest Region

230 Chestnut Street
Meadville, PA 16335-3481
814-332-6648

Counties: Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Forest, Jefferson, Lawrence, McKean, Mercer, Venango and Warren

This fact sheet and related environmental information are available electronically via Internet. Access the DEP website at <http://www.dep.state.pa.us> (choose Information by Subject/Water Management/Watershed Conservation/Storage Tanks).