



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.

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 vehicular 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?
- Is the tank vent clogged or restricted because of ice, snow or insect nests? (Screened vents can be used to prevent insect nest problems.)
- Are there any signs of rust, weeps, wet spots or excessive dents on the tank's surface?
- Is the overfill whistle silent when the tank is being filled? (Ask your delivery person.)
- Are there any drips or signs of leakage around the filter or valves?
- Are there signs of spills around the fill pipe or the vent pipe?
- Do the oil lines between the tank and the furnace run either under concrete or aboveground without being encased in protective tubing?
- Is the fuel-level gauge cracked, stuck or frozen...or are there signs of oil around it?
- Is there danger of snow or ice falling on the tank?
- 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 the tank vent clogged or restricted because of ice, snow or insect nests? (Screened vents can be used to prevent insect nest problems.)
- Is your tank taking on water - a rise in water level greater than 1/2" 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 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 fill pipe 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; and
- 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.
- √ 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 Cleanup Program's Fact Sheet, "Storage Tank and Spill Prevention Act." (Owners may want to first notify their private insurance company before hiring a contractor to see if any cleanup costs are covered. Furthermore, some insurance companies want to approve a contractor first as part of their policies.)

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.
- √ Help may be available. The DEP has a reimbursement program for tank owners who have underground storage tanks with a capacity of 3,000 gallons or less used for storing heating oil for consumption on the premises where stored to assist with costs of taking corrective action in response to a release. The release must have occurred on or after January 30, 1998. Full details, instructions and the application form are available at the following Web site: www.depweb.state.pa.us/landrecwaste/cwp/view.asp?a=1241&q=461919.

Regional DEP Offices:

Southeast Region

2 East Main Street
Norristown, PA 19401
484-250-5900

Counties: Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia

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

Southcentral Region

909 Elmerton Avenue
Harrisburg, PA 17110-8200
717-705-4705

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

Southwest Region

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

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

Northeast Region

2 Public Square
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711-0790
570-826-2511

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

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

Central Office
Bureau of Waste Management
Division of Storage Tanks
PO Box 8762
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8762
717-772-5599
800-42-TANKS (in PA only)

For more information, visit www.depweb.state.pa.us, keyword: Storage Tanks.