

TIPS FOR RESIDENTIAL HEATING OIL TANK OWNERS

Residential heating oil tanks are tanks that store fuel oil to provide space heating on premises where they are located. Leaking heating oil tanks can contaminate public and private drinking water supplies, pollute soils, create the potential for fires and explosions, and subject tank owners to very expensive cleanup costs that are often not covered by typical homeowner's insurance policies. With proper tank management, spills and leaks can be avoided.

How can heating oil tanks be protected from spills and overfills?

1. **ROUTINELY INSPECT THE EXTERIOR OF AN ABOVEGROUND TANK AND ALL ATTACHED EQUIPMENT.** Many times, leaks can easily be detected and corrected before extensive environmental damage occurs. Tanks and equipment should be inspected for uniform corrosion, pitting, holes, leaking pipes, loose joints, and loose fittings. Be aware that tanks can rust from the inside out, and corrosion failures do occur from water sitting at the bottom of the tank. **A freshly painted tank does not mean that it is structurally sound!**

Aboveground tanks can collapse when the tank legs rust or when the soil underneath settles due to the freezing and thawing cycle. To prevent collapses, tanks and equipment should be frequently inspected for structural soundness, such as weak or unsteady support legs. Aboveground tanks should be installed on a concrete pad and be secured with floor flanges and concrete anchors. Never place an aboveground tank directly on the soil. **Remember**, a 275-gallon tank full of heating oil weighs over one ton. Aboveground tanks should be installed in a secure area, away from vehicular traffic, and be protected from high winds and any potential falling objects such as tree limbs, snow, ice, etc., that could damage the tank or break the attached equipment.

2. **INSTALL SPILL AND OVERFILL PREVENTION DEVICES.** Spills and overfills can 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. The product distributor can advise the tank owner about available devices.
3. **ENSURE THE TANK ADDRESS IS CLEARLY VISIBLE AND THE FILL LINE IS CLEARLY MARKED.** This is extremely important for multi-family dwellings and in areas where dwellings are located close together. Many spills and overfills have resulted from deliveries made to the wrong tank.
4. **CONSIDER A SECONDARY CONTAINMENT STRUCTURE.** If a release from the tank does occur, the easiest way to limit the liability is to capture and contain the entire release before it enters the environment. Double-walled underground tanks, diked aboveground tanks, and retrofit structures for existing aboveground tanks are readily available. A product distributor can advise tank owners on various options.

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

Yes. There are numerous documented cases of heating oil being delivered through fill pipes for basement tanks that no longer exist. Some simple steps to avoid this costly mistake include: 1) Remove the fill line after the removal of the tank; 2) If the fill line cannot be removed, then permanently seal both ends of the fill pipe; 3) Contact the oil delivery company and inform them that the tank has been removed and that under no circumstances should a delivery be made to the tank.

Self-Inspection Checklist for Basement and Backyard Aboveground Home Heating Oil Tanks (ASTs)

If the answer is "YES" to any of the following questions, call an 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 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 a protective casing?
- 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 the answer is "YES" to any of the following questions, call an oil burner technician for a more detailed inspection and corrective measures.

- Are you using more oil than normal?
- Is the tank vent clogged or restricted because of ice, snow, or insect nests? (Screened vents can prevent insect nest problems.)
- Is the tank taking on water - a rise in water level greater than 1/2" for an 8- to 12-hour period? (An oil-burner technician can check for water or provide the owner with water-finding paste to check themselves.)
- Is the overfill whistle silent when the tank is being filled? (Ask a 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 should be done if a residential heating oil tank leaks?

- ✓ Contact the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) immediately. It is the responsibility of the tank/property owner to notify the appropriate DEP regional office of the location and extent of the release. A list of DEP regional offices is shown below.
- ✓ 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, refer to DEP fact sheet *Leaking Underground Storage Tanks: Controlling Cleanup Costs* (Doc. # 2620-FS-DEP1610). 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. Remember, it is the responsibility of the tank/property owner to initiate and complete all necessary corrective action measures. For more information on DEP's cleanup standards, please contact the appropriate DEP regional office.
- ✓ Keep detailed and accurate records. It is very important to keep records of cleanup action plans and actions taken.
- ✓ Help may be available. DEP has a reimbursement program to assist tank owners with costs of taking corrective action in response to a release from an underground heating oil tank with a capacity of 3,000 gallons or less. Full eligibility details, instructions, and the application form are available at www.dep.pa.gov, Businesses > Land > Site Remediation > Storage Tank Cleanup Program > Heating Oil Cleanup Reimbursement.

DEP publication *Home Heating Oil Releases* (Doc. # 2620-BK-DEP4310) provides additional information to help individuals respond to a heating oil release and manage any subsequent cleanup. It is available at www.dep.pa.gov, Businesses > Land > Site Remediation > Storage Tank Cleanup Program > Residential Home Heating Oil.

Regional DEP Offices:

Northwest Region

230 Chestnut St.
Meadville, PA 16335-3481
814-332-6648

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

Southwest Region

400 Waterfront Drive
Pittsburgh, PA 15222-4745
412-442-4000

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

Northcentral Region

208 W. Third St., Suite 101
Williamsport, PA 17701-6448
570-321-3636

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

Southcentral Region

909 Elmerton Ave.
Harrisburg, PA 17110-8200
717-705-4705

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

Northeast Region

2 Public Square
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18701-1915
570-826-2511

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

Southeast Region

2 East Main St.
Norristown, PA 19401-4915
484-250-5900

Counties: *Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia*

Central Office

Bureau of Environmental Cleanup and Brownfields

Division of Storage Tanks

P.O. Box 8762
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8762
717-772-5599
800-42-TANKS (in PA only)

For more information, visit www.dep.pa.gov, Businesses > Land > Storage Tanks.