

Residential Fuel Oil

Maintaining your residential fuel oil tank

If you own a fuel tank on your property you have a legal responsibility to properly maintain it and to clean up any spills or leaks that may occur. You are also responsible under the *Environmental Protection Act* for reporting any leak or spill from your tank that causes, or could cause, property damage or health, safety or environmental problems.

Proper care of your tank is in everyone's best interest. Compensation for damages to your own or your neighbors' property as a result of an oil spill can be costly and may not be fully covered by your home insurance policy. Oil spills can also cause significant environmental damage. Some examples of problems that can result from residential fuel oil spills include:

- contaminated vegetation, soil, groundwater and surface water;
- property damage;
- offensive odors;
- fires and explosions.

Preventing spills

Having your tank installed by a registered contractor (under the *Energy Act of Ontario*) and inspecting it regularly can help you avoid the problems associated with oil spills and leakage.

Installing your tank

Homeowners are required to ensure their tanks are approved, that is, that they fulfill minimum requirements to avoid tank failure as stipulated in the Energy Act. All basement and above-ground tanks should be accessible for inspection.

Maintaining basement and above-ground tanks

Taking the following steps can help you avoid problems and ensure the safe operation of your oil tank:

- Inspect your tank for leaks at least once every year (see below for tips).
- Replace your tank if it is more than 30 years old or if you are unsure of its age.
- Empty any unused tanks.

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Maintaining your underground tank

It is recommended that you replace your underground tank with an above-ground tank to allow for easier detection of problems.

If your tank is underground, take the following precautions.

- Hire a registered contractor to inspect your tank for leaks at least once a year.
- Empty unused tanks.

If your underground tank has not been used for two or more years or you no longer intend to use it, you are legally required to remove it and also remove any contaminated soil.

Inspecting your tank

Use the following homeowner checklist to inspect your tank. If you answer yes to any of these questions, call a registered contractor or your oil burner technician or fuel supplier for a more detailed inspection.

Basement and above-ground tanks

1. Are the tank legs unstable or on a shaky foundation?
2. Are there any signs of rust, weeping, wet spots or excessive dents on your tank?
3. Are there any drips or signs of leakage around the filter or valves?
4. Is there danger of snow or ice falling on the tank?
5. Is the vent clogged or restricted because of snow, ice or insect nests? (Screened vents can help prevent insect nest problems.)
6. Is the vent whistle silent when the tank is being filled? (Ask your fuel delivery person.)
7. Are there signs of spills around the fill pipe or vent pipe?
8. Is the fuel-level gauge cracked, stuck or frozen? Are there signs of oil around it?

Underground tanks

1. Are you using more fuel than normal?
2. Is your tank taking in water? Check for an increase in your water level of more than one cm for no less than an eight hour period. (Your oil burner technician can check for water or provide you with a water-finding paste so you can check for yourself.)

3. Are there signs of oil sheens in nearby streams, wetlands or drainage ditches?
4. Is the vent clogged or restricted because of snow, ice or insect nests? (Screened vents can help prevent insect nest problems.)
5. Is the vent whistle silent when the tank is being filled? (Ask your fuel delivery person.)
6. Are there signs of spills around the fill pipe or vent pipe?

Handling spills and leaks

Take the following steps as soon as you become aware that your fuel tank has spilled or leaked oil.

- a) Eliminate all sources of ignition.
- b) Stop the leak, if you can do so without risk.
- c) Contact your fuel supplier or a registered contractor for assistance.
- d) Contain the spilled oil using whatever materials are available (pails, rags, newspapers, peat moss, kitty litter, absorbent pads, sheets of plastic, etc.). Do not flush spilled oil or contaminated materials down the floor drain or sewer.
- e) Notify the Ministry of the Environment's Spills Action Centre (SAC) if the spill causes, or is likely to cause, adverse effects such as ground or surface water contamination, or damage to a neighbor's property. SAC provides 24-hour assistance for spills and spill situations.
- f) Transfer any remaining oil from the leaking tank to a sound tank or other approved container, made of leak-proof material, such as a 45-gallon drum.
- g) Clean up spilled oil and any contaminated soil or materials and place in appropriate containers such as plastic pails and garbage bags. For large spills, you may need the services of a professional cleanup contractor.
- h) Properly dispose of any recovered oil, contaminated soil and other contaminated materials. Your municipal works department and the Ministry of the Environment can provide you with information on acceptable waste management practices.
- i) Contact your insurance agent.

For more information on residential fuel oil tanks and Ontario laws governing them, please contact:

Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA)
Fuels Safety Division
3300 Bloor St. W.
4th Floor, West Tower
Toronto, ON M8X 2X4
(416) 325-1615

To report spills or to obtain more information on spill cleanup procedures, please contact:

Ministry of the Environment
Spills Action Centre
1-800-268-6060 (24-hours)
or (416) 325-3000

For information on other environmental topics visit the Ministry of the Environment web site www.ene.gov.on.ca or TSSA web site WWW.TSSA.org