

Know how to look after your oil

Domestic oil storage in England and Wales

February 2012

It's important to look after your oil

The oil you use at home as a fuel, for cooking or heating, is valuable; you've paid for it, so look after it. But oil can be a dangerous pollutant. It's your responsibility to make sure your oil and storage tank can't cause pollution.

Every year we deal with thousands of oil pollution incidents that damage the environment and property, most of which could have been prevented. The most common causes of oil pollution from domestic oil systems are:

- tank leaks and failures
- spills during delivery
- spills from ancillary equipment (for example fill points, valves, sight gauges and filters) and pipework
- theft and vandalism.

The damage caused can be extensive and clean-up costs can run into tens of thousands of pounds, not to mention the risk that you could be prosecuted and/or fined if your oil pollutes the environment.

Follow the advice in this leaflet to help your domestic oil storage facility stay safe and trouble free. We recommend you also read 'Get to know your oil tank', reference 1, which will help you understand and look after your tank.

The harm oil can cause

Heating oil (normally Kerosene) can contaminate soils, kill vegetation, pollute water features – such as ponds, lakes, ditches, streams, rivers and groundwater – contaminate building structures and produce odours/vapours which can harm people's health where exposure is prolonged.

Oil in the environment is toxic and poisons wildlife. It forms a film on the surface of water which stops oxygen getting into the water. Plants, animals and fish that live in the water can be poisoned or suffocated. Just 5 litres of oil can form a film that will cover a lake the size of two football pitches.



Kitchen floor and soil below removed because of oil contamination.



Heating oil spill has damaged the lawn

It can also affect your home and garden; it can kill your garden lawn and plants, and damage the structure of your house.



How to get it right – tank installation

Clearly it's better to stop pollution before it happens.



Correctly installed domestic oil tank

We recommend you always use a professionally qualified, competent tank installer/engineer to fit your new or replacement oil tank and pipework. Reference 2 has a list of organisations which run professional schemes. The installer will be able to advise you about:

- tank selection
- position – where to put the tank
- pipework – above or below ground
- fire control measures
- whether you need a fill point away from your tank and the need for an overfill prevention device
- if it's a legal requirement to have secondary containment such as a bund.

Before the tank is installed, check that your delivery company considers the safety for their delivery drivers to be OK and is happy with the spill prevention for the tank.

If your domestic oil storage tank holds 3,500 litres of oil or less, you must follow Building Regulations, reference 3. Check if your installer has followed the Regulations to see if your tank needs secondary containment, such as a bund to prevent oil escaping from the tank, and any ancillary equipment attached to it.

Your local authority enforces Building Regulations. If you have a new or replacement domestic oil storage tank installed, you must give them proof that your tank complies with these regulations (unless the work is already covered under full Building Regulations approval).

In England, if your domestic oil storage tank can hold more than 3,500 litres of oil, the Control of Pollution (Oil Storage) (England) Regulations 2001 are likely to apply. See references 2 and 4 to check the minimum requirements for your tank.

Don't forget your oil is valuable. Make sure your oil tank and pipework are secure so someone can't steal it or damage the tank. But don't make changes that affect how your tank works – never block the vent pipe. Ask your installer for advice.

How to get it right – tank care

Look after your tank; make sure you can see all around it, the equipment and pipework. Check them regularly to make sure they're not leaking. Look for:

- plants growing close to or over the tank; cut them back
- damage, distortion, cracks or corrosion to the tank and pipework
- oil staining or obvious leaks
- if you have one, damage to the sight gauge valve or supports.

If you see a problem, get it repaired by a qualified professional as soon as possible.

Have your tank professionally inspected and serviced annually when your boiler is serviced. 'Get to know your oil tank', reference 1, has space to record the annual checks.

Make sure your tank has an 'Oil Care' notice stuck to it. The notice has our incident hotline phone number – 0800 80 70 60 – and explains what to do if oil is spilt or lost; if you don't have this notice, you can get one from the Oil Care Campaign; see further information.

Your tank should be clearly labelled with the safe capacity and fuel type. We recommend you also put your house name or number on the tank to make sure fuel is delivered to the right tank.



Split in a plastic tank

How to get it right – deliveries

Check how much oil is left in your tank before you re-order. It's your responsibility to make sure you don't order more oil than will fit in your tank. When you place your order, tell the oil distributor about any changes to your oil storage facilities since their last visit and any special delivery instructions that apply.

Make sure the delivery driver can reach your tank without having to lift the oil hose over or around obstacles.

If you can, make sure someone is at home to supervise the oil delivery. If you're unable to be at home, make sure the delivery company has details of any special precautions the delivery driver should follow for your tank.

After the delivery, make sure the sight gauge on your tank, if it has one, is closed and isn't leaking. Never leave sight gauge valves open; if they're damaged, all the oil could run out of the tank. If you need to monitor levels continuously, have an alternative contents measurement device installed instead.

What to do if you discover a spill or leak

- Stay safe; never put your safety at risk to clean up a spill.
- Call our 24 hour incident/pollution hotline free on **0800 80 70 60** if you can't clean up the spill yourself or want some advice.
- Stop the flow of oil as close to where it's leaking from as possible.
 - If pipework or an appliance is leaking, close the main tank valve to stop the flow of oil from the tank.
 - If the tank is plastic and has split, carefully rub a bar of soap into the crack to stem the flow of oil.
- Put a container under the leak to collect the spill, for example a bucket or rubbish bin.
- Use either sand, earth or a commercial oil spill kit to contain the oil and stop it entering drains or watercourses.
- **Don't** use detergents or a hose to wash spilt oil away; this makes the pollution worse. You're likely to spread the contamination and increase the scale and cost of clean-up.
- Notify your insurance company that you've had a spill.
- If you need an emergency clean-up response, contact an accredited spill clean-up company.
- If oil has soaked into the ground, you must arrange for a professional clean-up company to remove all contaminated soil to prevent long term problems on your land or any neighbouring land.
- Contact your tank installer/engineer urgently if your tank or equipment needs to be repaired. Don't try to repair them yourself.

Will my household insurance cover the cost of a spill?

Whilst it won't actually prevent pollution, we suggest you check your home insurance policy covers you for loss of oil and pollution clean-up costs on your premises as well as your neighbours'.

Read your insurance policy wording carefully. Every policy is different and there will be specific exclusions. Generally, domestic insurance policies will only cover sudden or unforeseen events. It's unlikely to cover leaks caused by lack of maintenance or gradual seepage. Your buildings insurance policy will only cover damage to buildings as defined by your policy wording. Your contents insurance may consider damage to third party property, third party land and impacts on third party activities.

Many householders only find out that their insurance doesn't cover them when they've had a spill. This can leave them with heavily polluted ground in their garden which may affect the property value. Insurers won't pay either the fines for causing pollution or the improvement works we require you to make to stop the spill happening again. Don't assume your insurance company will pay for all eventualities. Check your policies and discuss with your insurer if you have any questions or concerns.

Further information

1. [Get to know your oil tank](#)
2. [Above Ground Oil Storage Tanks: PPG 2](#)
3. [The Building Regulations 2010 – Approved Document J Combustion appliances and fuel storage](#) systems ISBN 978 1 85946 371 0 from RIBA bookshops tel: 020 7256 7222;
4. [Guidance Note for the Control of Pollution \(Oil Storage\) \(England\) Regulations 2001](#) PB5765. Available from DEFRA: Tel. 08459 33 55 77

The Oil Care Campaign:

You can order a free small (domestic) Oil Care tank sticker from www.publications.environment-agency.gov.uk, search for Oil Care.

We welcome any questions or comments about this leaflet, or suggestions about how we could improve it, please email us at pollution.prevention@environment-agency.gov.uk, phone us on 03708 506 506 or write to us at:

Environment Agency
99 Parkway Avenue
Sheffield
S9 4WG.

Contact us:

Environment Agency
03708 506 506
(Mon to Fri 8 – 6)

Incident hotline
0800 80 70 60
(24 hours)

Floodline
0845 988 1188