



DOMESTIC OIL STORAGE

Looking after your heating oil

Many rural properties rely on oil-fired central heating, in particular in villages where there is no mains gas supply. Although leaks are not a common occurrence, when they occur they can be costly to the householder and can result in environmental pollution.

Each year the Environment Agency deals with around 3,500 oil pollution incidents, of which a substantial number are leaks and spills from domestic oil storage tanks. Following this simple guidance will help to protect the environment and may save you money.

Oil and the environment

Oil is toxic and harmful to plants and animals. Spilt or leaking oil can contaminate watercourses and soil, and can pass through the soil and rock to reach groundwater. In Derbyshire Dales there are a large number of private water supplies that rely on the cleanliness of groundwater for their domestic use. On entering a watercourse or groundwater, oil can spread quickly and contaminate a large area in a short space of time.

Oil tanks

Oil tanks must be sited at least 10 m from a pond, river, ditch or lake and wherever possible at least 50 m from a borehole or spring. Ideally you should know where any underground pipe work runs and ensure that no above ground activities can puncture it. An Oil Firing Technical Association (OFTEC) technician can advise you on the testing of underground pipe work. A tank should also be sited more than 1.8 m from a non-fire rated building or structure. If you have an internal oil storage tank further fire regulations apply.

The Local Authority, which controls the installation of any new or replacement domestic oil storage tank, will require a Building Notice to show that the work complies with current Building Regulations (unless the work is already covered under a full Building Regulations approval). Alternatively, the work can be done by a 'competent person'. This is someone who can self-certify their own installation work. OFTEC-qualified and registered installation technicians are regarded as competent persons.

Modern, or newly installed, domestic oil tanks over 2500 m³ must be bunded. A modern bunded tank simply stores the oil in a tank within a tank, so that any leaks to the internal tank are caught within the outer plastic tank. With proper maintenance a modern tank will last for up to 20 years. Older style tanks are typically made of a single skin and constructed from metal. This means they are more likely to corrode (rust) and result in leaks. Furthermore they are not normally bunded so any leak will not be contained.

Most domestic oil tanks have a capacity below 3500 m³ (770 gallons). If you have a tank with a capacity greater than 3500 m³ serving a domestic property you must comply with The Control of Pollution (Oil Storage) (England) Regulations 2001 (as amended).

Modern banded oil tank



Modern un-banded oil tank



Preventing an oil leak

- Check your oil tank weekly and especially before any delivery and prior to the winter months. Checks to undertake include:
 - The integrity of the tank – check the corners and any joints or welds, look for cracks in the plastic
 - Damage to, or leaks on pipe work, gauges and valves
 - Signs of corrosion (rust) – a metal tank should be painted regularly to help prevent corrosion
 - Evidence of leaks underneath the tank and around pipe work
- Ensure the stop tap is working
- Place a bucket under the tap to capture any drips
- Keep a bucket of sand near the tank for use to absorb any leaks
- Monitor how much oil you use so that you will easily and quickly be able to notice any loss of oil
- Check how much oil is in your tank (and know the tank volume) before receiving a delivery to avoid the risk of overfilling
- Supervise deliveries, particularly if the delivery driver cannot see the tank during filling
- If your tank is not banded, consider building a bund around the tank
- Ensure new tanks are installed by an OFTEC registered technician
- Have your boiler, tank, ancillary equipment and all pipe work checked by an OFTEC technician at least once a year
- If you identify a problem or potential problem, get it fixed without delay

Identifying an oil leak

The following actions may help you identify an oil leak.

- Check for odours. Odours from domestic heating oil can be very strong and are an indication of a leak, often one which has been ongoing for some time. If you are unsure if what you are smelling is oil, ask one of your neighbours for their opinion. Leaks in confined spaces, such as from pipe work within the house, can give rise to symptoms such as sleepiness, nausea, dizziness, headaches and sore throats. In extreme cases a person can become unconscious.
- Check for dark staining around the tank or pipe work
- A sudden increase in the amount of oil that you use

What to do if you have or suspect an oil leak

- Try to identify where the oil is leaking from
- If possible stop the flow at source by turning the connection off between the tank and the pipe work or boiler (the isolation valve)
- Prevent the oil from entering a watercourse or drain by putting down sand or earth to try to absorb the spill
- NEVER use detergents or a hose to try to wash away the oil, this can make the problem worse
- Contact your oil supplier and ask them to remove any remaining oil that is liable to leak out
- Call the Environment Agency's free 24-h (0800 80 70 60) hotline or Environmental Health during office hours (01629 761212) for advice on how to deal with the leak
- Contact your insurance company to advise them of the situation

Decommissioning or removing an oil tank

When removing, or ceasing to use, an oil storage tank you should ensure that the tank is fully drained before it is taken out of use or removed. It is advisable to use a suitably qualified technician to undertake this work. After decommissioning or removal, check the area around the tank and pipe work to ensure the procedure has not caused any leakage of oil. If there is evidence of an oil leak please contact Environmental Health for further information on how to remove the contaminated soil.

Household insurance

You should check your household insurance policy to make sure that you are covered for leaks. Adequate insurance cover should include the cost of replacing the lost oil and any environmental clean up required as a result of an accidental loss of oil. The cost of any environmental clean up should include sufficient liability to cover you if neighbouring land and / or private water supplies are affected in addition to your own land and property.

Many insurance companies will not pay out if a leak has been occurring over a period of time, so it is essential that you regularly inspect your tank and monitor your usage. Additionally most insurance companies require you to have a bunded tank.

EMERGENCY CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Environment Agency 24-h pollution hotline
0800 80 70 60

Derbyshire Dales District Council (Environmental Health)
01629 761212

FURTHER INFORMATION

OFTEC – Finding a registered technician
<http://www.ofteconline.com/locatecompany.asp>

OFTEC – The OFTEC easy guide to domestic oil storage
http://www.oftec.org/documents/EG_dom_oil_storage_aw.pdf



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