



Tips For Residential Heating Oil Tank Owners

Source: DEP Fact Sheet

Residential heating oil tanks are used to store fuel for furnaces or boilers to heat homes. The tanks can either be aboveground tanks, normally located in basements or utility rooms, but sometimes located outdoors, or underground tanks, generally located adjacent to dwellings. Heating oil tanks can cause a threat to public safety and the environment from spills or leaks. Leaking tanks can contaminate ground water, surface water, and soils, as well as create the potential for fires and explosions. This fact sheet, consistent with PSU's program, provides the points to inspect for tanks, indicators of leaks or spills, and the actions to be taken in the event of a spill or leak.

All tanks should be inspected routinely. The lists below contain the points of an inspection.

Aboveground Tank Inspections:

- Are the tank legs unstable?
- Are there signs of rust, wet spots, or excessive dents?
- Are there any drips or signs of leakage around the fuel lines, filter, valves, or fittings?
- Is there danger of snow or ice falling on the tank?
- Is the tank vent restricted by ice, snow, or insect nests?
- Is the overfill whistle functional? (Ask the delivery person)
- Are there signs of spills around the fill pipe or vent pipe? (The oil distributor can install a spill basket to catch spills that may occur during deliveries)
- Is the fuel gauge functional and are there any signs of leakage around it?
- Is more fuel being consumed than expected?

Underground Tank Inspections:

- Is more fuel being consumed than expected?
- Is the tank taking on water? (This can be checked by the oil distributor or by purchasing water-finding paste and checking it yourself)
- Are there any drips or signs of leakage around the filter, valves, or fittings?
- Is the tank vent restricted by ice, snow, or insect nests?
- Is the overfill whistle functional? (Ask the delivery person)

Indicators of a Leak or Spill:

- Soil is soaked with heating oil;
- Soil or other surface around the fill pipe is stained;
- Product vapors are in the soils, basement, or other tank area;
- Fuel is seeping into the basement, stream, etc.;
- Well or spring water has a fuel odor or sheen;
- Fuel consumption has suddenly increased or tank fuel level has suddenly decreased;
- Furnace or boiler is operating erratically; or
- Neighbors are complaining of fuel odors.

Steps to Take if a Leak is Discovered:

1. Identify the source of the spill or leak – you may need a professional to test either the tank or the piping.
2. Stop or contain the release – absorbent material such as cat litter or peat moss can help stop the release from spreading. If the source is a leaking tank, call the oil distributor to remove the remaining product from the tank.
3. Report any release to the environment to DEP – you are required by state laws to notify the appropriate regional office (see the blue pages of the phone book for phone number) and take immediate actions to contain the spill/leak.
4. Begin the clean-up – contact professionals to help if needed. DEP can provide information on spill clean-up and responsibilities.
5. Keep detailed and accurate records of all clean-up activities.