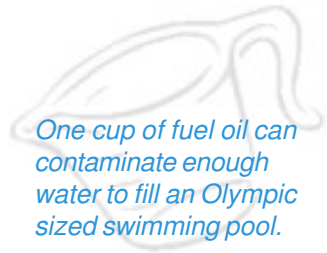


Home Heating Oil Tanks

what you should know



One cup of fuel oil can contaminate enough water to fill an Olympic sized swimming pool.

Avoid spills by detecting problems early on!

Do you have an underground, above-ground or basement heating oil tank on your residential property? If so, this information sheet could help you avoid costly and damaging oil tank leaks.

A full residential heating oil tank can hold about 1,000 liters of fuel. If that starts to leak, what may seem like a simple cleanup can become a complicated job involving replacement of the oil tank and supply lines, removing the contaminated oil, replacing part of a house foundation and even treating groundwater. Depending upon the extent of the spill, you can be in violation of Local, Provincial or even Federal laws. A big cleanup could cost more than your home is worth, and the full cost may not be covered by your household insurance. A little prevention could save you thousands of dollars in cleanup costs and fines, and help save your local stream or shoreline from damage.

Oil Tank Problems

Tanks can develop holes and release heating oil rapidly into the soil. This leaking oil can:

- pollute creeks and marine waters
- contaminate groundwater, and drinking water supplies in rural areas
- damage municipal storm drains
- enter the drainage systems of neighbouring buildings
- get into basements, making indoor air quality hazardous
- contaminate soils around the tank and cost thousands of dollars to remove and clean
- create combustible fumes
- delay the sale of a home while testing and remediation occurs

In addition, underground tanks can deteriorate, making dangerous cave-ins possible. While older tanks make it hard to get household insurance, underground tanks make it nearly impossible.



Types of Tanks

There are three types of household fuel oil tanks: above-ground outdoor tanks, buried outdoor tanks and indoor tanks.

1. Above-Ground Outdoor Tanks

Above ground tanks are outdoors, typically sitting beside the house, and are exposed weathering by sun, wind and rain. Outside damage is easy to see but inside corrosion is hidden from sight. Most insurance companies will not provide new homeowner coverage if an above-ground tank is more than 15 years old. If you have an existing policy, most insurers will advise replacing your 14 year old tank before your next renewal date.

2. Buried Outdoor Tanks

Many older homes still use underground fuel tanks which are buried in the yard and have a fuel supply line to the house. While new installations are permitted by the BC Fire Code, many insurance companies will not provide homeowner's policies for underground tanks. Of the three types of tanks, underground ones are the most prone to damage and deterioration. It is difficult to find leaks in an underground tank because you can't see the tank walls. They can leak for years without owners realizing. If you suspect a leak, call your fuel supplier to help find an underground tank testing company to check for you (see the suggestions listed on the opposite side of this sheet).

When buying a house, consider including a condition of sale requiring the existing owner to find out if there is a buried tank on the property, and to pay for any removal and clean up. This way, you won't be faced with surprise costs or have trouble getting homeowner insurance. You will also avoid liability under the Environmental Management Act of BC for any future clean-ups.

3. Indoor Tanks

Specially designed indoor oil tanks generally last longer and are less likely to spill than outdoor tanks because they are protected from the weather. While problems on the outside of the tank are visible, corrosion inside is not. Depending upon the insurance company, you may have to replace your indoor tank once it is 20 years old in order to renew your policy. Some companies specify 25 years.

For more information see **Ministry of Environment fact sheet webpage:**
http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/epd/epdpa/contam_sites/fact_sheets/pdf/fs32.pdf

Installing and Removing Tanks

New tanks must have a label showing the date and place of manufacture. The label should also show the tank meets a national construction standard (such as the ULC). Used oil tanks are not permitted for re-use in Saanich.

New tanks must be installed in accordance with the BC Fire Code and Saanich's Oil Burning Equipment Bylaw #8204. To install, relocate, abandon, or remove a tank in Saanich, you will need a permit from the Fire Department. For more information call the **Fire Prevention Office at 475-5500**.

Indoor Tanks - Installation Tips

- Hire a qualified contractor for installations – this is not a “do-it-yourself” project!
- Place the tank where it can be easily inspected yet not damaged by normal household activities
- Do not place the tank against the wall as this can cause rust
- Protect the supply line and filter from damage
- Don't store objects on top of the tank
- Buy a simple spill kit from a safety supply store and keep it near the tank

Above-Ground Outdoor Tanks - Installation Tips

- Hire a qualified contractor for installations – this is not a “do-it-yourself” project!
- Place at least 30m (50 ft) from any well or watercourse
- Paint the outside of the tank with enamel paint to prevent rust
- Support the tank properly to prevent shifting or falling
- Place over a continuous poured concrete slab
- Slope the tank slightly toward the drain
- Keep the tank from touching the wall
- To allow for changes in ground level, the oil burner supply line should have a horizontal loop before entering the building
- Slope the supply line towards the building to prevent water collection
- Place the oil filter inside the home so water doesn't freeze and split the line
- Install the supply line through the top of the tank to prevent the tank draining if the line breaks at the contact point
- Buy a simple spill kit from a safety supply store and keep it nearby

Got a Buried Tank You No Longer Use?

The BC Fire Code requires the removal of buried tanks which are of no further use, or have not been used for two years. Once a tank is removed, the surrounding soil must be assessed for contamination. Any contamination must be cleaned up by a contractor.

You will need a permit from the Saanich Fire Department to remove a buried oil tank. If the Fire Inspector finds that removal is impractical, a tank may be cut open, cleaned, and filled in with inert material. Hiring a professional tank company for removals and clean-ups is strongly recommended. Find them under “Oil Tanks - Installation, Cleaning and Removal” in the yellow pages. For more information, call the Saanich Fire Prevention Office at 475-5500.

Maintaining Your Oil Tank

Fuel tank leaks are tricky. The tanks are metal and can corrode from the inside out, making failures hard to spot before they become serious.

Because oil is lighter than water, any water from condensation goes to the bottom of the tank where it can cause corrosion. Damaged fuel lines that lead from the tank to the furnace, and loose fuel filters can also result in leaks.

- Have your oil filter changed each year when your furnace is professionally serviced
- Be alert to any oil smells near the tank
- Watch for rust or corrosion where legs are welded to the tank
- Watch for leaks in the fuel filter, or watch for the nozzle becoming plugged
- Inspect the underside of above-ground tanks for oil spots or drips
- Watch your oil bills for unexplained or sudden increases in the amount of oil you've been using
- Regularly check the outside of tanks for rust. Clean off rust and apply rustproof paint
- When replacing a tank, don't re-use the old oil. Water, sludge, and bacteria in old oil can cause corrosion and leaks in a new tank
- Keep the tank relatively full over the summer to reduce water condensation inside
- Check the tank for problems after each fuel delivery
- Keep a simple spill kit handy in case of leaks or spills (available from safety supply stores)

If you see a spill or leak ...

1. Eliminate all sources of ignition - turn off the furnace, baseboard heaters, fireplaces, fans, etc.
2. Stop the leak if you can do so without risk.
3. Contain the spill using whatever materials you have (pails, rags, newspapers, peat moss, kitty litter, absorbent pads, etc.)
4. Don't flush oil spills into a floor drain, sink, toilet, or any municipal drain or ditch.
5. If the spill enters the drains or goes onto a Saanich road, call **Saanich Public Works at 475-5599**. (Between 4:30 pm and 8:30 am call **475-6190**)
6. Contact your fuel supplier or look under “Oil Tank Installation, Cleaning & Removal” in the yellow pages for help.
7. If soils, ground or surface water have been, or are likely to be, contaminated, call P.E.P. at 1-800-663-3456.
8. Transfer any remaining oil from the leaking tank to a sound tank or leak-proof container such as a 45 gallon drum.
9. Clean up the spilled oil and any soil or materials and place in sturdy containers. For a large clean up you may need a professional contractor.
10. Properly dispose of any recovered oil and cleanup materials. Saanich Public Works Department can provide you with information on acceptable disposal options. Hartland landfill also accepts household hazardous wastes from residents only. **Check <http://www.crd.bc.ca/es/hartland/index.htm>** or call the CRD at 360-3030 for hours and limitations.
11. Contact your insurance agent if needed.
12. Have a repair service replace the tank and/or other leaking parts.