



Environment
Agency

oil care



Looking after your heating
oil in the south east

We are the Environment Agency. It's our job to look after your environment and make it **a better place** – for you, and for future generations.

Your environment is the air you breathe, the water you drink and the ground you walk on. Working with business, Government and society as a whole, we are making your environment cleaner and healthier.

The Environment Agency. Out there, making your environment a better place.

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looking after your heating oil in the south east

Oil is a valuable fuel, particularly in areas without mains gas supply. It is important to store it responsibly to avoid health and pollution issues.

Unfortunately, leaks of heating oil from domestic tanks are a cause of pollution in the south east. Each year between 2002 and 2005, there were around 180 fuel spills. Of these, 36 per cent of oil spills were caused by leaks from pipe work and 27 per cent from tanks. That's 64 per cent of all oil spills coming from oil tanks and pipes.

If spilt oil passes through the soil and rock and reaches our precious groundwater, private and public water supplies may be polluted.

Groundwater provides 75 per cent of our water in the south east. Once groundwater is contaminated it can be difficult, even impossible, to clean up.

If your oil leaks the clean-up operation could cost hundreds of thousands of pounds. This could involve a great deal of inconvenience to you and your neighbours and your insurance may not cover the costs.

To prevent oil pollution make sure you:

- check your tank regularly
- prevent damage to above and underground pipework
- supervise every oil delivery
- ensure the stop tap is working
- place a bucket under the tap to capture drips

The best thing you can do to make sure there is no chance of pollution in the event of a leak is to bund your tank.

Check that your insurance covers the cost of the clean up operation!

oil and the environment

- Oil is toxic and harmful to plants and animals. It is also a threat to habitats and a danger to water at the surface and underground.
- Groundwater (water stored in the ground) is a major water resource in many parts of the south east. It provides 75 per cent of our public water supply and wells for many rural households. Groundwater is vulnerable to pollution because pollutants, like oil, can be transported underground over large distances quickly.
- Oil spills occur regularly in the south east. This is because of the large number of domestic oil tanks, especially in rural villages where there is limited mains gas supply.
- Cleaning up oil spills is difficult and can be very expensive.



A recent domestic oil spill in Hampshire cost over £100,000 to clean up. If a water company's drinking water source is affected the clean up cost can exceed £1 million.

what insurance do you need to cover you if an oil leak occurs?

Make sure that you have adequate insurance cover, and not just to replace the lost oil. Check with your insurer to see if environmental clean up is covered if you suffer an accidental loss of oil. Your policy should have a high enough liability limit to cover you if neighbouring land and/or boreholes are affected. You should also make sure your policy covers the cost of cleaning up oil on your own property as you will be required to do this under the Water Resources Act 1991. One unfortunate householder in Hampshire had only third party cover and recently had to pay around £100,000 for the clean up of an oil leak on his own land. Note insurance companies may not pay if the leak has been occurring over time, so regular inspection of your tank and monitoring of usage is important.



Damaged tank



Excavations during the clean up of a spill

how to prevent pollution

Taking action to prevent pollution in the event of a leak from your oil tank can prevent environmental damage and avoid a costly clean up. Cleaning up an oil spill is disruptive and time-consuming. It can take months or years, and may include digging trenches and sinking boreholes on your land, monitoring visits and meetings with consultants, the Environment Agency, insurance companies, loss adjusters and lawyers.

- The best way to protect your tank and pipe work is with a container, such as a bund, around the base of your tank. The Oil Firing Technical Association (OFTEC) can advise you on special requirements for bunds. A bund will prevent pollution in case of a leak and save you from the disruption of a clean up programme. When buying a new tank choose one that is integrally bundled (a tank within a tank).
- You must site your tank at least 10 metres from a pond, river, ditch or lake and at least 50 metres from a borehole or spring where possible. OFTEC can advise you of the best place to site or re-site your tank to minimise your pollution risk.
- Always get new tanks installed by a qualified OFTEC registered technician.
- Never leave sight gauge valves open, use British Standard automatically closing valves or electronic gauges.
- Check your tank, pipe work, gauges, sight valves and bund regularly. Look for corrosion, bulging, damage, interference and signs of leaks. Get a qualified OFTEC registered technician to service and inspect your tank and pipes at least once a year.
- If you have underground pipe work, do you know exactly where it runs? Make sure that no above ground activities can puncture it and ask an OFTEC technician about testing.



Integrally bundled steel tank

what should you do if an oil leak occurs?

- Monitor how much oil you use so that you will be quickly alerted by any loss of oil. Even small leaks can add up to a large loss over time if left unchecked. Alarm systems that alert you to a leak are available.
- Supervise deliveries, particularly if the delivery driver cannot see your tank during filling.
- Get your delivery company to assess your oil tank in terms of health and safety and pollution prevention.
- Make sure you have a domestic Oil Care sticker on your tank. You can get one from the Environment Agency (free of charge for single stickers).
- Stop the flow at source by turning the tap off.
- Call the Environment Agency's free 24-hour emergency pollution hotline on 0800 807 060 for advice on how to deal with the leak.
- Prevent the oil from entering a river, drain or groundwater by putting down sand or earth to absorb the spill. Keep a bucket or bag of sand nearby.
- Never use detergents and never use a hose to wash away spilt oil as this can make the problem worse.
- If you have a plastic tank rub soap into the split to seal if possible. This is only a temporary solution.
- Contact your fuel supplier and ask them to remove any fuel liable to leak out.
- Contact your insurance company to advise them that a leak has occurred, that a clean up operation may be needed, and to reclaim the cost of your lost oil.

Integrally banded plastic tank



what impact would an oil spill have on your life?

It could happen to you.

An account from a Hampshire householder affected by a spill on neighbouring land.

‘Oil pollution at home: Counting the cost.

Oil pollution has disrupted our lives for the past three years. The blight is still with us and will remain a significant problem for an indeterminate period.

On 25 June 2002 we noticed a distinct smell of kerosene in the house. We thought the boiler might need a service but on the 28th, oil came out with the tap water. The whole water supply, including the pipes, was contaminated. The family was devastated. Our immediate feeling was shock, horror and helplessness.

Our water supply came from our well, which smelt heavily of kerosene. We immediately set to and dug along the oil pipe that fed the heating oil from the storage tank into the house. I was able to assure myself that there was no leak from the system, so the oil must have come from somewhere nearby. I asked my neighbour to investigate his oil supply and heating system urgently. The leak was found two days later. It was thought that oil had potentially been lost over a period of six months. The total quantity lost was uncertain.

Four years later action to remedy the problem continues. A number of wells have been sunk on both properties to monitor the extent of pollution. Oil is still being recovered and recorded



Before the spill



During the clean up

monthly. Meetings were initially held monthly, now quarterly, involving the Environment Agency, building contractor, loss adjustor, consultant, my neighbour and myself. We have followed a practical programme to clean up at both properties.

I requested to be returned to my original state of having well water, and a new well was sunk. Tests are required before use; in the meantime we are connected to the mains supply.

Over the four year period there has not been one day when cleansing equipment of some kind is not visible in the garden and pump room. Pipes, storage tanks and equipment, some heavy, have been in use. Monitoring schedules demand weekly/monthly visits. Meetings require co-operation and agreement on mutual convenient dates, with minutes which clearly direct action by whom and when. Legal advice is essential together with the valuation of the property before and after the pollution. Decisions have to be made on matters that may have far reaching consequences

without necessarily having expert knowledge. It would seriously disturb anyone faced with this situation.

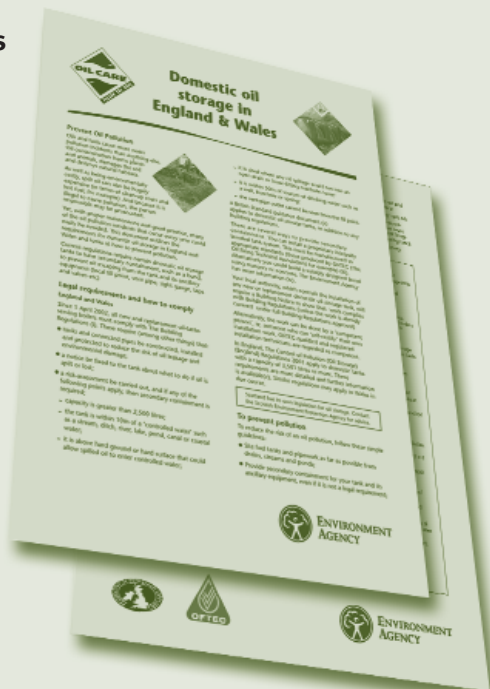
Despite the long period of the clean up there is no certainty when work can be claimed complete. A clean certificate will never be issued. The monitoring will continue and I fear that the blight will remain long after work has ceased. The situation has been very stressful, made significantly worse by the unpredictable future outcome in circumstances not of one's own making. We are still having to count the cost.'

The Environment Agency has been working closely with environmental consultants appointed by the neighbour's insurers to remove the leaked oil from the good quality chalk groundwater and to protect the local public drinking water supply. The cost of this clean up is being covered by the insurers of the neighbouring property but is likely to take up to five years to achieve.

what legislation controls domestic oil tank storage and who does it apply to?

- All new and replacement oil tanks serving boilers must comply with The Building Control Regulations 2000.
- All domestic oil tanks with a volume of over 3500 litres must comply with The Control of Pollution (Oil Storage) (England) Regulations 2001.

For more information and an introduction to legal requirements and your obligations see the *Domestic Oil Storage in England and Wales* leaflet available from the Environment Agency.



where can you get more information?

For information about your nearest OFTEC registered technician contact OFTEC at: Foxwood House, Dobbs Lane, Kesgrave, Ipswich, IP5 2QQ.

Tel: 0845 6585 080. Email: enquiries@oftec.org
www.oftec.org

Further advice, copies of the *Domestic Oil Storage in England and Wales* leaflet, Oil Care stickers and a list of relevant reference materials are available on the Environment Agency's web site at: www.environment-agency.gov.uk or you can call the Environment Agency on 08708 506 506.

Our partners



Working with the water industry in the south east

**Would you like to find out more about us,
or about your environment?**

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