

STORAGE OF OIL IN TANKS

DON'T ALLOW YOUR TANK TO LEAK



INTRODUCTION

If you, or someone you know has oil fired central heating, this leaflet can help you avoid the considerable costs and inconvenience of an oil leak. Over the last few years there have been an increasing number of pollution incidents caused by faulty or badly maintained domestic central heating oil tanks. Leaked oil can be very difficult and expensive to clean up. In some circumstances houses have had to be evacuated because oil soaked into the ground close to the houses and produced fumes inside making it impossible to live in the properties. This leaflet gives advice on how to prevent a leak from your oil fired central heating system. A little time and money spent on maintenance now, may avoid clean-up costs of up to thousands of pounds in the future.

IT IS IN YOUR OWN INTEREST TO PREVENT AN OIL LEAK!

WHAT CAN GO WRONG

Below are a few examples of what can happen if things go wrong. They are real incidents which have happened to people.

- Oil supply pipe between tank and house developed a leak. Oil contaminated ground under neighbours house. Cost of clean up several thousand pounds. Neighbours house had to be evacuated and ground floor completely torn up to remove contaminated ground.
- Newly installed oil fired boiler not connected up properly. On firing, the system, oil was pumped out across the floor. Oil soaked into the ground at the wall/floor junctions. Fumes filled the house for several months. House had to be evacuated while floors were torn up and the contamination cleaned up. Costs of several thousand pounds incurred.

- A central heating oil tank mounted on concrete block supports corroded. Oil leaked out of the tank, staining the support and soaking into the ground below. Water pipes to two houses ran under the spill area. As oil can penetrate plastic water supply pipes, there was a serious risk of the water supply being contaminated. The water pipes had to be replaced and the contaminated soil removed. Costs ran into several thousands of pounds.



An example of a house being cleaned up following a leak of oil.

HEALTH RISKS

A leak of oil in or near your house can be a risk to your health. Fumes from the oil can give people symptoms such as:-

- “feeling drunk” (*sleepy, fuzzyheaded, slow to react, dizzy*)
- headaches
- nausea
- skin rashes
- sore throats
- If levels of oil fumes are very high, it could be possible for someone to pass out as a result.

OTHER EFFECTS

Oil can affect underground plastic pipes such as water supply pipes. Oil can penetrate the plastic and contaminate the water giving rise to odours and taints. Drinking water contaminated with oil can be a serious risk to your health.

INSURANCE

Not all household insurance policies cover for this type of leak. Check your insurance policy and if it does not cover leaks from oil, consider including this in your cover. If a leak occurs and you are not insured, you may have to pay for the clean-up out of your own pocket.

***PREVENT A LEAK • SAVE MONEY
AVOID THE DISRUPTION OF CLEAN UP***

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO TO PREVENT A LEAK

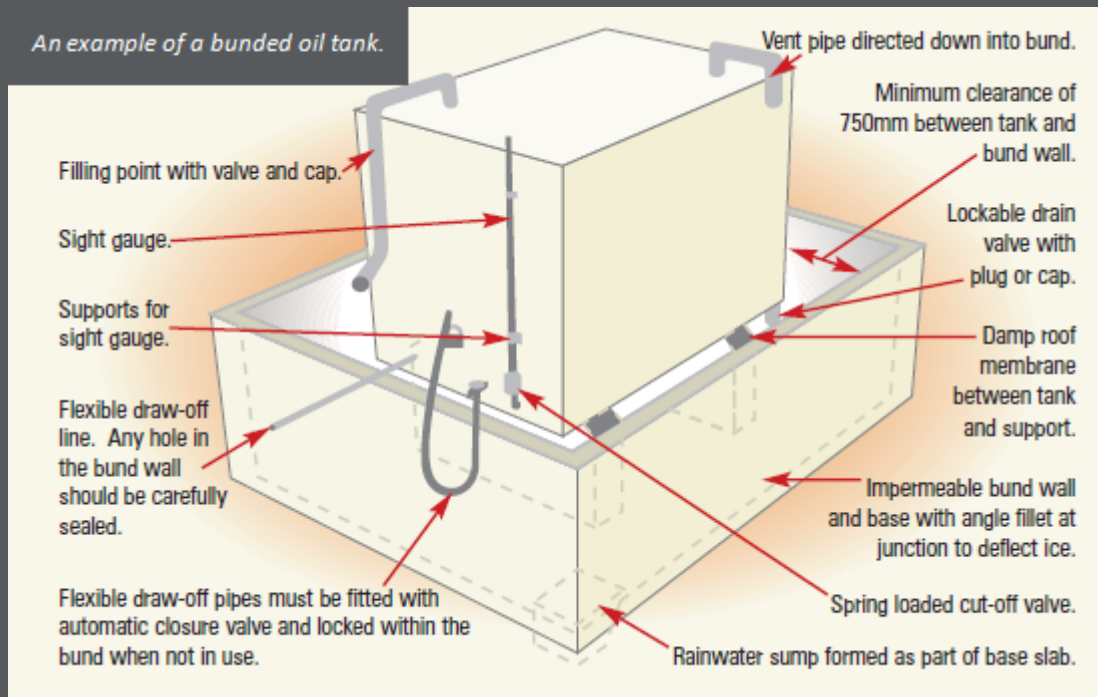
Regular checks and maintenance on your central heating oil tank and oil supply pipes may avoid the problems of a leak. If you cannot do it yourself, employ a competent person. The cost of a service will be considerably less than the cost of a leak.

The following points give a summary of what to look out for:

1. If your tank is not bunded, consider building one. A bund is a collection trough which sits under the oil tank. In the event of the tank leaking, all the oil will be retained within this leak proof trough. The bund should have the capacity to hold at least 10% more than the capacity of the tank (as it can collect rainwater over time). Bunds can be built of brick, concrete or other watertight material. From time to time you may need to empty rainwater out of it, but do not be tempted to fit a drain hole, unless fitted with a tap which can be securely closed. Some designs of tank actually incorporate a bund. The tank has a second skin which acts a safety net if the tank leaks.

It is now a legal requirement for most commercial and larger tanks (more than 3,500 litres) to be fitted with a bund. Although not a legal requirement for domestic tanks to be banded, we would strongly recommend bunding in all cases.

2. Check the condition of your tank regularly. If it is a metal tank, ensure it is painted regularly to avoid the metal corroding.
3. If possible, supervise any deliveries of oil. Make sure you do not order more oil than you can fit in your tank.
4. Monitor and become familiar with your normal usage rate of oil. If consumption appears to go up, check for leaks immediately. There have been instances where people have re-filled a leaking oil tank without checking when their last delivery was, doubling the amount of oil lost into the ground without realising. The more oil lost, the more difficult and expensive the clean up.
5. Have a thorough regular maintenance check carried out by a competent person on your whole system, not just the boiler.
6. Keep fill points on the tank clear of obstructions and ensure they are tamper proof.
7. Be aware of black staining on tank supports or bases, this may indicate a leak.
8. Be aware of any oily smells. This may indicate a leak.



REMEMBER in preventing leaks you could also be preventing possible legal action for contaminating drinking water supplies, streams or rivers. New legislation relating to contaminated land operates on a polluter pays principle. If your tank pollutes a neighbour's property or a water course you could face potential legal action and the costs of the clean up.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO IF YOU FIND A LEAK

If you find a leak of oil on your system you should:-

- ✓ Try and find out where the leak is coming from and stop further oil leaking as soon as possible. (This may include having the tank emptied as a matter of urgency).
- ✓ Any taste or smell of oil in your drinking water should be reported to the water company immediately. Do not drink any water suspected to be contaminated until tests have been carried out.
- ✓ Call in an engineer or other competent person to repair/replace the tank or pipe work as necessary.

- ✓ Contact us at the Environmental Services section of the Council for advice on cleaning up any contaminated ground. You should note however that we cannot do the clean up for you and whilst we can offer general advice, you may need to employ a specialist company/consultant to do a ground investigation and provide specific recommendations for clean up.
- ✓ Taking action quickly will help you save money, by preventing more ground becoming contaminated.
- ✓ Taking action quickly may avoid the need for the Council to declare the ground “Contaminated Land” under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 Part IIA, and subsequent enforcement action against “the polluter”.

DON'T

- ✗ Do not delay taking action
- ✗ Do not assume the problem will go away
- ✗ Do not drink any water suspected to be contaminated



An example of a corroded tank with left hand side support stained with oil & ground soaked with oil.



Clean up of ground after leaking tank removed, showing drinking water pipe through ground.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Newark and Sherwood District Council Environmental Health

environmental.health@nsdc.info

01636 650000

USEFUL WEBSITES

<http://www.newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk/heatingoil/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency>

Many oil tank suppliers have information on storage on their web sites.