

Underground Heating Oil Tank Removal

A Homeowners guide

This guide has been prepared by The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), Waste Management Division (WMD)

If your home heating oil storage tank is buried underground (a UST), you probably know that a leak could be very unfortunate - not only for the environment, but for your pocketbook. The best way to avoid the problems associated with a leaking tank is to have your tank taken out of the ground and have a new tank installed, either underground (a tank meant for underground oil storage not a tank for aboveground use), or aboveground in your basement, garage or storage shed.

Vermont statutes require a residential heating oil UST over 1,100 gallons be registered with the DEC, while residential heating oil USTs less than 1,100 gallons are not required to be registered. Tanks over the 1,110 gallons are required to have an environmental site assessment conducted when the tank is to be removed. USTs under that size are not required to have the assessment, but it is highly advised to have one done.

An environmental assessment determines if there has been a release of heating oil to the ground. Typically, the tank owner hires an environmental consultant to ensure that this work is done in accordance with the law. The DEC can provide technical assistance for this work, and will respond to emergencies or public safety hazards. Typically, the consultant makes the determination of the extent of the problem and devises a plan for the cleanup. Tanks of *any size* are required to report any leaks, spills and or contamination at anytime to the DEC (working hours (802) 241-3888, after hours 1-800-641-5005).

State law does not require the removal of a residential underground heating oil tank if it isn't leaking, but Vermont statute requires that any UST out-of-service, or not in use for more than a year to



be permanently closed. This means having the tank emptied and (in most cases) removed from the ground.

Why should I consider removing my underground storage tank? Many underground home heating oil tanks are made of bare steel, and do not have corrosion protection. Any UST that does not have adequate corrosion protection can leak if left in the ground for too long. Many of these tanks have outlived their design life and, if left in place, will eventually rust and leak.

The odds of a leak happening increase, as the tank gets older. Even small, slow leaks can pose serious threats to your family, your neighbors and the environment if they go undiscovered for a long time. And, if your tank does leak, a costly cleanup may be needed. Having your underground storage tank removed now can save you both money and anguish in the long run.

Who does underground tank removals? The DEC maintains a list of the contractors around Vermont that do this work along with a list of environmental consultants.

When selecting a contractor, shop around and get cost estimates from more than one contractor. They should be able to provide you with an accurate cost estimate by visiting your home to determine both where your tank is located and whether there are any obstacles to getting the job done. Compare services the companies can provide and be sure to check references. As with any substantial home improvement job, get a written cost estimate and a contract that outlines the services to be performed before work begins. Remember that usually the price does not include the cost of a replacement tank, sampling and testing, cleanup work if a leak is found, and landscaping after the removal is complete.

Can I test my tank for leaks instead of digging it up? Yes, but it may cost you less to simply remove your tank from the ground. It is important to consider that no test can predict what will happen next year, next month, or even the next day. Your money may be better spent on tank removal since you will have to dig the tank up anyway if the test reveals it is leaking.

Can I just empty the oil from my tank and leave it underground? Yes, but there are strict requirements that usually cost more than removing the tank. Before a tank can be left in the ground, you will need to have it cleaned and filled with sand or concrete, and the area around it checked for contamination. Filling the tank in place can cause future problems if a cleanup is needed or if there is excavation at the property. Finally, if you sell your home, a bank or the buyer may ask for more environmental testing or the removal of the tank.

Can I tell if my tank is leaking now? An unexplainable increase in oil consumption, the odor of fuel oil in your basement, oil in a basement sump or oil showing up in floor drains or external drains may all be signs of an active leak. Any of these situations should initiate an investigation and possible tank removal.

How will I know if my tank has leaked? A damaged tank or piping, soil that is stained or gives off strong oil odors, sheen on the groundwater, or environmental test results are all indicators of tank

system leaks. Quantification of contamination by field screening or lab analysis is required when there is a suspicion of a release. So before, make sure the contractor has the necessary expertise to make such a measurement.

The basic inspection is a sight, smell and physical check of the tank and the surrounding soil. Sampling and analysis is required of the soil surrounding the tank. Testing of the groundwater may also be needed if there is evidence that the contamination has reached the groundwater. In addition, the contractor should determine if there are any water supply wells, wetlands, ponds or streams, which may be at risk if there is contamination present.

Is there any financial assistance to remove/replace/ or upgrade my tank? The WMD can issue grants of up to a \$1,000.00 for this work. Please contact the WMD at 802-241-3888 for an application.

Are there state funds available to help with the costs of cleanup? If you have no private insurance that would cover the costs of a cleanup, then you may be eligible for reimbursement of these costs from the Vermont Petroleum Cleanup Fund (PCF). Upon request, the DEC can provide you with a copy of the document titled, "Procedures for Reimbursement from the Petroleum Cleanup Fund", which further describes this program.

What if contamination is found? First, don't panic. The problem could be minor and relatively simple to correct. Simply remember the importance of notifying the DEC and taking the appropriate cleanup actions right away. Addressing the problem now will prevent unnecessary cost and damage later.

Won't my insurance cover the cost of cleanup? You may have pollution liability coverage or you may not. You will have to review or call your insurance company about your policy. In many instances homeowners are left with no insurance because there is a UST on the property. In some cases where your insurance company will include your policy, but the premium is very high.

For additional information, contact the Waste Management Division at (802) 241-3888 or visit our website:

<http://www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/wastediv/sms/smsgdint.htm>
