

Leaking fuel oil tanks

More than 40 per cent of all oil spills in Canada are from home heating oil tanks. Home heating fuel oil tanks deteriorate over time and most corrode from the inside where you can't see it. This internal corrosion is caused by an accumulation of water and sludge at the bottom of the tank that can result in small pin hole leaks.

Dangers of fuel oil spills

- A leaking fuel oil tank is a serious fire and environmental hazard.
- Leaking oil can contaminate groundwater supplies. Just a few drops can contaminate a large volume of water.
- Fuel oil that's spilled into a basement can pose a serious health risk to indoor air quality.
- Cleaning up a spill from a fuel oil tank is expensive. In some cases, a cleanup can cost more than property is worth.

Fuel oil tank tips

- Ensure your oil tank is certified and approved for use as a fuel oil tank.
- If you have an outside tank, ensure it's rated for outdoor use.
- Have a registered contractor properly install your fuel oil tank.
- Have your tank inspected at least once a year by a registered contractor.
- Never purchase or install a used fuel oil tank.
- If outside, ensure the top of the tank is clear of ice or snow.
- Ensure inactive fill pipes on the outside of your home are removed or capped.
- Consider replacing your fuel oil tank if it's older than 15 years.

Things to watch on your tank

- Is your fuel oil tank unstable or resting on a foundation that's not solid or combustible? Is it resting against a wall?
- Are there signs of rust or corrosion on the legs of the fuel tank?
- Are there signs of rust, corrosion, dents, weeping or dripping oil from the outside of the tank?

- Are there signs of leaks or spills around the fill pipe or vent pipe or by the tank itself?
- Is the fuel gauge for the tank missing, cracked or not working?
- Is the vent whistle on the fuel oil tank silent when the tank is being filled?
- Is there a strong smell of fuel oil near the tank?
- Does oil consumption seem higher than normal?
- If the answer to any of these questions is yes, contact a registered contractor immediately to have your tank inspected.

What to do if you have a spill or leaking tank

- Eliminate all sources of ignition or open flames near the leak or spill.
- Contact a fuel oil supplier or registered heating contractor.
- Stop the leak if it can be done without risk.
- Contain spilled oil using whatever materials may be available such as pails, rags, cat litter, plastic garbage bags or other possible collection materials.
- Don't allow spilled fuel oil to enter a floor drain, sewer or septic system.
- Transfer remaining oil from a leaking tank to a sound tank or other approved container made of leak-proof material.
- Clean up spilled oil and any contaminated solid material and place in leak proof containers. For large spills, a professional contractor should be contacted.
- Properly dispose of old tanks, containers, recovered oil, contaminated soil or other materials as recommended by a qualified professional in accordance with environmental regulations.