

## **IS YOUR UNDERGROUND HEATING OIL TANK LEAKING? ARE YOU SURE?**

**Underground oil tanks pose a serious threat to human health and the environment. A tank can begin leaking slowly and over time a large amount of oil can be discharged or it can fail instantly and release a large quantity of oil all at once. The oil can impact nearby streams and groundwater and yours or your neighbors water wells**

### **HOW DO I KNOW IF MY TANK IS LEAKING?**

#### **Good Question!**

- ⇒ Is your tank very old? Many tanks fail when between 10 and 15 years old, some sooner.
- ⇒ Does the tank have a large quantity of water in it\*.
- ⇒ Do you seem to be using more oil than before\*.
- ⇒ The tank and lines fail a tightness test\*.
- ⇒ Hire an environmental consultant to test the soil around the tank for oil.
- ⇒ Does a test of your well water show the presence of hydrocarbons.
- ⇒ Check local stream for signs of a sheen or discoloration on the water.

**(\* your fuel supplier might be able to help you with these items.)**

## **SO WHAT IF MY TANK IS LEAKING, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ME?**

- ⇒ **It can cost you money!** Oil leaking out of a tank is like putting money in the trash.
- ⇒ It can make yours and your neighbors drinking water unsafe if you are on a well.
- ⇒ It can reduce the value of your property.
- ⇒ It can poison nearby streams or wetlands. Even small amounts of oil can harm or kill salmon fry and other aquatic animals.
- ⇒ **It can cost you money!** Cleaning up an underground pollution incident can be very expensive. These types of spills often go undetected for a long time and can affect many properties other than just the spillers.

### **HOW LONG CAN AN UNDERGROUND TANK LAST?**

#### **That Depends!**

Some tanks last 30 years or more while some only last five years. Why the difference?

- ◆ Types of or lack of coatings on the tank.
- ◆ The type of soil or rock the tank is in has an affect. Sand is good. Rocks tend to wear holes in the tank, often very quickly. If the tank is placed in very acidic soils it can wear out rapidly too.
- ◆ Constant contact with water can cause damage to the tank.

- ◆ The material and thickness of the material used to make the tank can affect its lifespan.
- ◆ The tank's coating or the tank itself was damaged when the tank was put in the ground.
- ◆ The location of underground electric lines can be very important. Underground electric lines can cause electrolysis in the tank or the fuel lines. In some cases fuel lines have corroded and begun to leak in as little as six months.

## **HOW DO YOU TAKE AN UNDERGROUND TANK OUT OF SERVICE?**

### **IF YOU ARE REMOVING THE TANK!**

1. Pump the fuel out of the tank.
2. Flush or steam clean the tank and remove the remaining fuel and sludge.
3. Remove the tank and back fill with clean material.
4. Properly dispose of the tank and old fuel lines\*

\* Check with your fuel dealer or local government body about disposal methods for your tank.

## IF YOU ARE LEAVING THE TANK IN PLACE!

1. Remove all fuel from the tank.
2. Uncover the tank and cut a hole in the top. (Should be done by a contractor, etc).
3. Clean inside the tank with steam or hot water.
4. Remove remaining mixture and sludge from the tank.
5. Cut off the fill and vent pipes and disconnect and remove (preferred) or cap the old supply and return lines.
6. Fill the tank with clean, inert material such as sand and cover the tank with clean soil or rock.

## QUESTIONS!

Why should the tank be steamed cleaned and sludge removed? To eliminate any future pollution threat.

Why cut off fill and vent lines and remove or cap supply and return lines?

To prevent any oil in the lines from leaking out and to prevent the accidental use of the lines in the future.

Why fill the tank with sand? To prevent the tank from coming out of the ground due to frost heaving or flooding. It also prevents the tank from collapsing and leaving a sink hole in the future.

### TIPS!

- ◆ **Take pictures—this will provide a record of tank closeout/removal for future buyers!**
- ◆ **Have an environmental consultant take samples of the site! If there is a pollution problem it can be fixed now. If there is no problem you can prove it!**
- ◆ **Mark the location of the tank so future residents don't try to dig into the tank—just a courtesy!**

For additional information visit the Alaska Dept. of Environmental Conservation web site at:

[www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/perp/hho.htm](http://www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/perp/hho.htm)

# HOME HEATING OIL *tank* EDUCATION PROGRAM

## Underground

## Heating Oil Tank

## Closure Guide



Alaska  
Department of  
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