

Press release: Check your oil tanks for winter

The Environment Agency is urging people to check their storage tanks for leaks to protect the environment and reduce the risk of potentially large financial losses.

With winter approaching, many households – particularly in rural areas – will soon be getting oil delivered.

Leaked oil can end up in drains, many of which lead directly to rivers, streams, lakes and even garden ponds, having the same effect as pouring it directly into the watercourse.

Oil is poisonous to fish and other wildlife and smothers plants – just two litres of oil could seriously pollute the volume of fresh water needed to fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool.

Neil Paisley, from the Environment Agency's Environmental Management team, said:

Heating oil can cause serious problems if it gets into the environment. But it's not just the cost of losing the oil that can be expensive, clean-up costs can be large and are not always covered by household insurance policies.

This is why it is vital that oil is only ever stored in tanks that are in good condition. Both the tank and pipe work should be regularly inspected and people should never buy more oil than they can safely store.

Householders with domestic oil tanks should take the following action to ensure they are safe for use:

- Site tanks as far away as possible from drains, streams and ponds.
- Inspect tanks, pipes and other equipment for leaks, damage and interference once a week. Any problems should be fixed as soon as possible by an Oil Firing Technical Association (OFTEC) technician www.oftec.org.uk.
- Arrange for the boiler and tank to be serviced at least once a year by an OFTEC technician. This should include any underground pipe work.

- Monitor how much oil you use. If the volume of oil being used suddenly increases, there could be a leak.
- Supervise oil deliveries. Never allow your tank to be overfilled and don't order more oil than you can safely store.
- Check your home insurance covers clean-up costs on both your property and neighbouring land. Always notify insurers immediately in the event of a spill or suspected spill.
- If a tank starts leaking, you should try to stop the oil soaking into the ground or going down drains. Contact your insurance company to arrange for an OFTEC technician or UKSpill accredited clean-up company <http://www.ukspill.org> to attend.
- Secondary containment, such as a bund, will prevent oil from escaping into the environment if a leak occurs. This is a legal requirement for domestic tanks which store more than 3,500 litres.

To report an oil spill or leak, contact the Environment Agency's 24-hour emergency hotline on 0800 807060.