



Oil leak

Prevention & action

Domestic heating fuel storage tanks

Borough Council of
King's Lynn &
West Norfolk



If you have oil fired central heating, this leaflet may help to avoid the costs and inconvenience of an oil leak.

Oil is one of the most common causes of contamination. It can affect human health and property. It can also pollute water courses, damage plants and wildlife, make soil infertile and ruin natural habitats.

This leaflet gives advice on how to prevent a leak from your oil-fired central heating system and what to do if you do have an oil leak or a spill during a delivery. A little time and money spent on maintenance now, may avoid clean-up costs of thousands of pounds in the future. Check your insurance to make sure that your property is covered against oil spills.

Health

An oil leak in or near your house can be a risk to your health. Fumes from the oil, especially in enclosed spaces, can give people symptoms such as:



Sore throats



Headaches



Skin Rashes



Nausea (& vomiting)

If levels of oil fumes are very high, it could be possible for someone to pass out as a result.

Oil can also affect underground plastic pipes such as water supply pipes. Oil can penetrate the plastic and contaminate the water giving rise to odours and tainted water. 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.

If you feel unwell you should contact your doctor or NHS 111.

What you should do if you find a leak

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



1. Stop the Leak – If possible, shut off the supply at the tank and try to find where the leak is coming from. This may include having the tank emptied as a matter of urgency (keep the telephone number of your fuel oil company available). Or instructing a competent person to repair/replace the tank or pipe work.



2. Try to address any excess – Use an absorbent material. If you have an oil spill kit, cat litter or another absorbent material to help soak up any oil that has been spilled. If it is dripping and there is space, try to catch the leaking oil in a bucket to prevent it from worsening the spill. Do not use any container that will be used for human or animal food and water. Temporary fixes such as sealant or putty for a metal tank or soft soap for a split in a plastic tank can stem the flow temporarily. Try to establish the amount of oil lost, check the tank level and the date of the last delivery.



3. Contact your insurance company – If you have home insurance, damage associated to a fuel spill may be covered on your policy. Check if your insurer or yourself should arrange for an engineer to repair or replace the tank or pipework, and who should do any necessary clean up works.



4. Contact The Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk and the Environment Agency – Contact the council about the spill on 01553 616200 so we can give further advice. Notify the EA on 0800 807060 to deal with any issues that could occur to the surrounding areas/properties.



5. Update and monitor – Keep in touch until the spill is resolved. Your insurance company may appoint a specialist contractor on your behalf to make sure the repairs and clean up are completed safely.

Things to keep in mind:

- Never use detergents or wash spilt oil away. It could spread and make the problem worse.
- Become familiar with your normal usage. If oil consumption appears to go up, check for leaks.
- Be aware of oily smells, black staining on tank supports or bases, this may indicate a leak.
- Taking action quickly will help you save money, by preventing more ground becoming contaminated and could avoid the need for the Council to declare the area “Contaminated Land” under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 Part IIA, and enforcement action against “the polluter”.

Insurance

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



What you should do to prevent a leak

- Reduce pollution risk by positioning fuel tanks and pipework as far away as possible from drains, streams, ponds, wells and boreholes;
- It is a good idea to keep an oil spill kit with absorbent materials, drain blockers and leak sealing putty to help you should a leak occur;
- If you have an older tank. Consider providing secondary containment or bunding for your tank and its pipework;
- Install a new tank and/or pipework using OFTEC registered installation technicians. This will ensure that the relevant Building Regulation, as well as the manufacturer's installation instructions are followed;
- Make sure your tank has an 'Oil Care' notice stuck on it, with information about what you need to do in the event of a spillage. These should be supplied with new tanks. The tank should also be clearly labelled with the safe capacity and fuel type;
- Inspect your tank, its ancillary equipment and pipework at least weekly for corrosion, damage, interference, and signs of leaks; Ensure metal tanks are repainted regularly to avoid corrosion;
- Use an OFTEC registered technician to service and inspect your boiler, tank, ancillary equipment and all pipework, at least once a year;



- Be alert to possible leaks by carefully noting your oil usage pattern. A small leak can, over time, add up to a large loss of fuel. This is especially important if underground pipes are used;
- If you notice or suspect a leak get it investigated and repaired by your OFTEC registered technician immediately;
- Check your current fuel stocks carefully before re-ordering oil. Do not allow your tank to be overfilled;
- Never leave site gauge valves open. Don't use site gauge valves that don't close automatically. Only use auto-close British Standard sight gauge valves. The valve should only be activated when you take a level reading. If you want continuous level monitoring get suitable equipment installed and have the sight gauge removed;
- Always supervise your oil delivery. Discuss delivery procedures with your fuel delivery company, check that they are happy with your tank and its delivery arrangements from health and safety and pollution prevention aspects;

REMEMBER in preventing leaks you could also be preventing possible legal action for contaminating drinking water supplies, streams or rivers. The legislation relating to contaminated land operates 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.

Useful contacts

Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, Environmental Health and Housing, Kings Court, Chapel Street, King's Lynn Norfolk, PE30 1EX. Telephone: 01553 616200.

Environment Agency Incident Hotline - 0800 807060

Building regulations - Approved Document J combustion appliances and fuel storage systems - The rules on installation of combustion appliances and fuel storage systems

OFTEC Oil Firing Technical Association - represent the oil firing industry, principally involving the use of oil for heating and cooking by promoting the market for high quality fuel and equipment through excellence in design, manufacture, installation and servicing. Contact OFTEC (Oil Firing Technical Association) Tel 01473626298 or email www.oftec.org.

British Standards Institute, BSI 389 Chiswick High Road, London W4 4AL for BS 5410 Part 1 1997 – Code of Practice for Oil Firing, installations up to 45kW output capacity for space heating and hot water supply purposes ISBN 0-580-27671-6.

See the websites below more information:

GOV.UK - www.gov.uk/oil-storage-regulations-and-safety/home

Oil Care Campaign - oilcare.org.uk/look-after-your-oil/

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www.west-norfolk.gov.uk

Environmental Health and Housing

Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk,
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