

Most homes built before 1975 used underground tanks for heating oil (tanks defined by at least 10% contact with the ground) - many of which are still buried. An estimated 88% of those tanks have aged to the point of leaking - with another 12% leaking to the point of groundwater contamination.

Groundwater contamination from underground heating oil storage tanks is a threat to the health of both people and wildlife. Severe illnesses from toxic waste can lead to immediate health problems and prolonged exposure to petroleum products can induce long term health effects such as certain types of cancers.

What to do in case of leaking tanks

NYS DEC regulates any tank larger than 1100 gallons, but all spills and leaks must be reported to the DEC. Upon the discovery of a leak, the NYS DEC Spill Hotline should be contacted immediately by calling 1-800-457-7362.

Once the spill is reported, a spill response team is dispatched to the scene, based on priority. From there, the leaking tank should be removed, the extent of the contamination delineated, and paperwork submitted to the DEC to close out the spill.

Know when to replace underground oil tanks

Regardless of soil conditions, most underground storage tanks will leak within 10-15 years of use. Tanks should be replaced at any sign of leakage and ones that are no longer in use should either be removed or closed, with the filling pipes either removed or decommissioned.

Contacts and Resources

NYS DEC Spill Hotline.....1-800-457-7362

Region 7 NYS DEC Offices

Syracuse.....(315) 426-7519

Cornell Cooperative Extension

Onondaga.....(315) 424-9485

Cayuga.....(315) 255-1183

Cortland.....(607) 753-5077

Soil & Water Conservation Districts

Onondaga.....(315) 457-0325

Cayuga.....(315) 252-4171

Cortland.....(607) 756-5991

County Health Departments

Onondaga.....(315) 435-3252

Cayuga.....(315) 253-1405

Cortland.....(607) 753-5035

Brochure produced by CCE Onondaga. Originally published December 2015, revised 2020. Cover photo from New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

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A Homeowner's Guide to Buried Heating Oil Tanks



Cornell Cooperative Extension
Onondaga County



The Cost of a Faulty Tank

Drinking Water

Many contaminants in petroleum based fuels contain toxic chemicals such as benzene, ethylene dibromide, toluene and xylene - all suspected carcinogens. Nervous and immune system damage can also be linked to long-term exposure of these chemicals.

Wildlife & Ecosystem

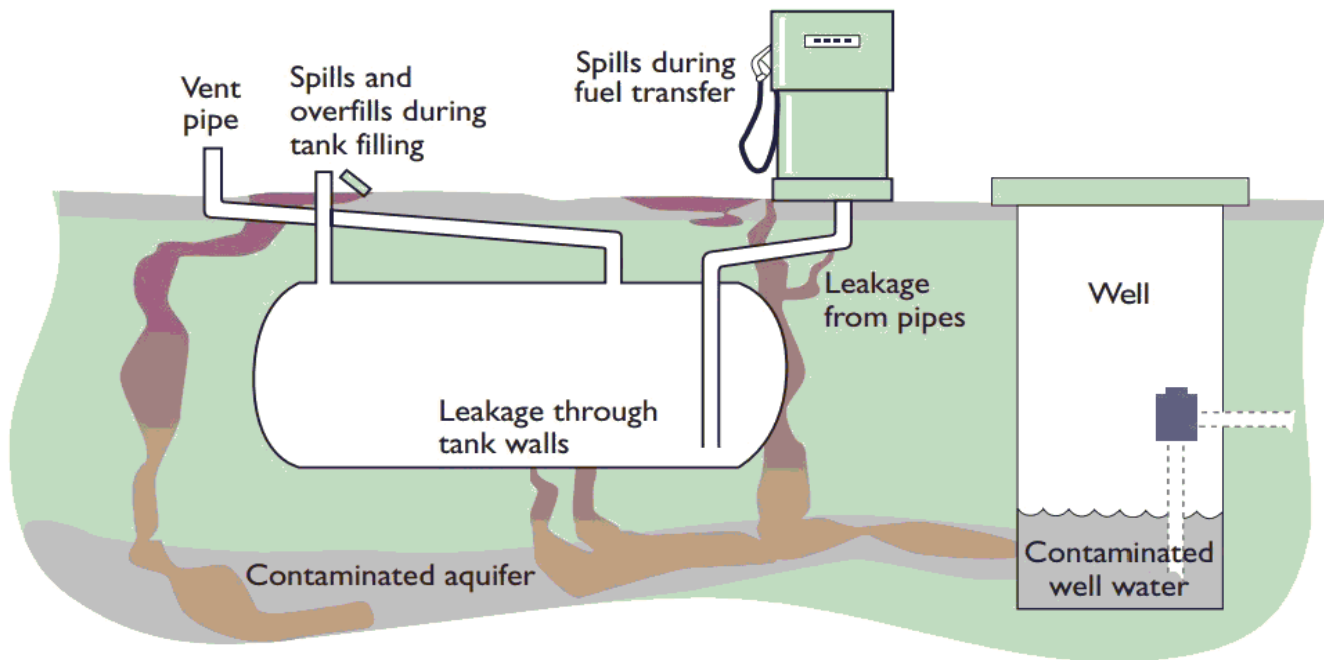
Heating oil in ground and surface water can similarly harm wildlife as it does humans. These contaminants in an aquatic ecosystem can manipulate stream temperatures and dissolved oxygen levels, both of which have negative consequences on fish and macroinvertebrates.

Financial Costs

Underground tank leakage assessments and clean up can result in costs of over \$20,000; and many homeowner's insurance policies contain pollution exclusions, leaving cost shouldered by the homeowner responsible.

Legal Costs

Groundwater contamination from a leaking oil tank can lead to personal injury lawsuits if contamination plumes reach neighboring properties. The costs of litigation can easily outweigh that of remediation and replacement of leaking tanks, so a swift response to these issues is recommended.



Indicators of Leaking Underground Storage Tanks:

- Physical damage or corrosion on pipes
- Off-colored soil and grass, odor of oil around tank or in soil or well water
- Groundwater or surface water sheen/oil slick
- Unexplained loss of heating oil inventory without usage

When to Test for Groundwater Contamination:

Any indicator of contaminants, including those listed above, should inspire soil or water testing for contamination. Any sign of illness possibly related to groundwater contamination is also a good time to test.

Active Tank Maintenance

Self Inspection Checklist:

- ✓ Regularly measure and record tank's inventory. If measurements show more loss than usage, this may be an indication of a leak.
- ✓ Have your tank vacuum tested for leaks.
- ✓ When replacing a tank, pick a location that is covered from above or located in a basement or garage.

If Leaking and Contaminants are Found:

Don't panic, but take action right away. Once a contamination is suspected or found, contact Regional NYSDEC Office (contact list on back cover) or the NYSDEC Spill Hotline at 1-800-457-7362.