

OIL STORAGE AND WELLS

Note: This is the text of an educational pamphlet prepared by the American Ground Water Trust for the State of Vermont as part of a grant-funded education project. Most of the information is relevant to any home with a well and an oil heating system.

THINK OIL AND WATER

Oil and water are both natural resources, but we all know that they don't mix. Keeping oil and water apart is especially important for those Vermont homes that use well water for drinking supply and store fuel oil for heating.

Fuel Oil

Originating deep underground as crude-oil in distant oil-fields, the fuel oil used for home heating in Vermont has been carefully formulated at a refinery, bulk delivered to a regional fuel depot and then brought to your home by one of the 117 fuel-oil distributors that serve the state. Home heating fuel oil is typically stored in 200-500 gallon tanks, either outside (above ground or buried) or in a basement. Properly maintained home fuel oil tanks are safe. It is the homeowners responsibility to periodically check that their furnace works efficiently and that their fuel storage tank has no leaks.

Ground Water

Ground water, replenished naturally by rainfall and snow-melt, is stored safely in sub-surface rock formations. Once a water well has been constructed, water can be pumped up when needed. Home well water often moves from deep underground to the tap in just a few minutes. Most properly constructed private wells safely produce water that can be used without treatment. It is the homeowners responsibility to periodically check the water quality of their well and the efficiency of their water system.

OIL and WATER TWO VITAL PRODUCTS THAT MUST BE KEPT APART

DID YOU KNOW ?

- Approximately 50% of homes, farms and businesses in Vermont are independently supplied with drinking water, most from private wells.
- There are 15 million homes in the U.S with their own well. Of all states, Vermont is ranked #3 as having the highest percentage of homes using water wells. (Maine is #1, New Hampshire # 2).
- Approximately 150,000 homes, farms and business in Vermont are heated by fuel oil. Nationwide, there are 12 million homes heated by oil.
- Many Vermont homes have a water well and use fuel oil for heating.
- Each year in Vermont, there are 30 - 50 (reported) accidental releases of oil from home heating oil tanks. There may be others that go unreported. How would you even notice the loss of a couple of gallons? One gallon of oil could possibly contaminate thousands of gallons of ground water, including your well, your neighbors' wells and maybe others nearby.
- Small amounts of fuel oil spilled on the ground may be naturally biodegraded by bacteria in the soil. However, spilled fuel oil that enters the soil or rock fractures near a badly sealed casing of a water well could cause problems.
- Oil tanks can last many years, but a tank that looks great from the outside may be leaking! In some instances (fortunately rare), tanks may even corrode from the inside. This can happen if water vapor condenses inside the tank.
- The integrity of any tank and its fuel lines can be easily checked by a simple pressure test.
- Most homeowner insurance policies do not cover onsite cleanup costs from an oil spill or the costs of finding a replacement water source if ground water is affected.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

Check System

Have your oil heat tank and lines checked. Fuel oil delivery companies have trained and experienced staff who will check your fuel system and answer questions.

Secure Tank

Above ground tanks should be on a level, secure concrete slab surface. If your home is in a flood zone, anchor your tank to the ground.

Watch Lines

If your tank has copper line from the tank to the furnace there should be no direct contact between the line and any concrete in walls or floors. The chemicals in concrete may react with the copper and could cause corrosion of the line.

Protect from Ice Falls

Protect your tank and outside fuel lines from ice or snow that might fall from the roof in winter and spring,

Overfill Alarm

Install a vent alarm, so the delivery person knows when the tank is full.

Mark the Fill Pipe

Make sure your fill pipe is clearly marked for fuel oil. Remove any out of service pipes to prevent accidental delivery to the wrong pipe. This is especially important in multi-occupancy dwellings.

QUESTIONS?

Ground Water or Water Wells

Call the American Ground Water Trust
16 Centre Street
Concord, NH 03301
tel: (800) 423-7748 fax: (603) 228-6557
e-mail info@agwt.org

Fuel Oil Storage Tanks or Heating Systems

Call your local Heating Oil Distributor or:
Shane Sweet
Vermont Oil Heat Institute
231 Tudor Road
Sandgate, VT 05250
tel: (802) 375-0000 fax: (802) 375-0009
email: vtpetro@sover.net

State Programs Related to Fuel Oil Storage

To report a spill of more than two gallons, to get state assistance for a spill clean-up, or to apply for a state grant to remove or replace an underground storage tank, call:

Marc Roy
Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation
103 South Main Street
Waterbury, VT 05671
tel: (802) 241-3874 [Mon-Fri 7:30am - 4:30pm] * *To report spills outside of normal business hours, call (800) 641-5005*
fax: (802) 241-3296
email: marcr@dec.anr.state.vt.us

This information was prepared by the American Ground Water Trust. The Trust is a national non-profit education organization based in Concord, New Hampshire. The Trust's educational programs are focussed on ground water protection. For additional information about the Trust and its programs call (603) 228-5444.