

## How safe is your heating oil storage tank?



### **Did you know...**

your property is located above chalk rock that is the source of your drinking water? This water is vulnerable to pollution from any oils that can easily enter the ground on your property.



### **Did you know...**

that leaks and spills from domestic heater oil are a major threat to public drinking water supplies and that property owners are responsible to cover clean-up costs, either directly or through their insurance company?



As your water supplier, Portsmouth Water pumps water from the groundwater contained within the chalk rock of the South Downs. Over recent years we have experienced an increasing number of pollution incidents caused by faulty or badly maintained storage tanks and from criminal activity, especially related to the attempted theft of fuel oil.



Taking action now can help prevent environmental pollution and avoid a costly clean-up. Cleaning up an oil spill is disruptive, and can take months or years of digging trenches and sinking boreholes on your property, monitoring visits and meeting with regulators, insurance companies, loss adjusters, consultants and solicitors.

If fuel oil spillages were to affect a groundwater used to supply drinking water, the clean up costs could exceed £1 million. In the worst case scenario the source may have to be abandoned resulting in reduced water supplies in the local area. The development of a new source can take years and cost many millions of pounds.

### **Prevention is better than cure!**



**The clean up of oil spills is difficult, can be very expensive and potentially stressful. A recent domestic spill cost a householder over £100,000 to clean up and the property owner informed us that they had not slept for weeks due to the stress of the situation. Heater oil can penetrate into your household walls and plumbing, rendering your property uninhabitable during remediation work. The oil can also migrate to and affect your neighbours' properties.**

### **To protect your oil, your property, your drinking water and the environment you should consider the following:**

- The **condition** of your oil tank – is it old, rusty and unbunded?
- How **secure** is your oil against theft? Is the tank screened from sight, lockable or do you need to re-locate it?
- What to do if you **find** a leak, who to contact or how to limit the potential impacts.
- Have you got the right **home insurance**? Does your insurance cover heating oil?
- Is your tank in the **best position**? How close is it to watercourses, ponds, wells and springs?
- Do you know where your **pipework** runs to? Damage to the feed pipe may not be obvious; is it protected?
- Do you regularly **check** your tank? Look for signs of tampering, signs of corrosion, bulging or staining, which indicate a potential or actual leak.



The Environment Agency has an excellent **FREE** document on their website called “*Get to know your oil tank: A guide to looking after an oil storage tank and avoiding pollution*”. It can be found on the web page below towards the bottom of the page under the heading ‘oil used in domestic premises’: [www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/oil/32012.aspx](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/oil/32012.aspx)

The Environment Agency Pollution Prevention Guidance webpage is also very useful and can be found at: [www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/pollution/39083.aspx](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/pollution/39083.aspx)

## **If the worst happens and you have a leak or spill:**

- Deal with it immediately. If you leave it you could cause a serious pollution incident.
- If you can, stop the flow of oil from source by closing valves or using material from a spill kit.
- Call the UK pollution incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60 (24 hours) to get advice and help. You are in an environmentally-sensitive location which needs a very quick response to prevent serious pollution of the local environment and drinking water supplies.
- Contact your fuel supplier for advice (they may offer a clean-up service or be able to recommend a course of action).
- Never wash any spilt oil away into drains or into the ground. Most drains connect to the nearest stream or river and oil can cause serious pollution.
- Never use detergents to clean up the oil; you could cause a worse pollution incident.
- Use the contents of a spill kit, sandbags or earth to soak up the oil if it's on a hard surface and to stop it entering drains, rivers or streams.
- If the oil has soaked into the soil/ground, you'll need to take action quickly to prevent it soaking further and possibly into groundwater supplies. You'll need a professional company with training and accreditation to clean up oil.
- Contact your insurance company and tell them that there's been a leak or spill from your tank or pipework and that a clean up operation may be needed and to claim the cost of your lost oil.



## **USEFUL CONTACTS**

### **Environment Agency**

24-hour emergency hotline on 0800 80 70 60  
[www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)

### **OFTEC (Oil Firing Technical Association)**

[www.oftec.co.uk](http://www.oftec.co.uk)

### **Portsmouth Water**

023 9249 9888 (during normal hours)  
023 9247 7999 (24 hour emergency line)