

The failures of oil tanks, used for home heating, are on the rise. Why? Coal use to be the dominant means of home heating prior to oil. Coal was also the fuel used by industries to produce heat and steam. But during the 1930's, fuel oil for furnaces started to become more commonplace as the coal units were converted. Today, those oil tanks would be about 60 to 70 years old and those installed during the building boom of the 1950's & 1960's would be approaching 40 years in age. That means they're likely in need of replacement. Even tanks 25 years old or younger may need replacement too. This has become a very big issue for homeowners but the same holds true for farmers and other property owners too...and it's not just oil tanks, it's all fuel storage tanks.

The problem? – Many of the oil tanks are corroding from the inside out, where the failure is not readily visible. This often occurs from condensation that builds up inside the tank. Since oil is lighter than water, the water goes to the bottom of the tank where they rust / corrode. The first sign of a bad tank could be an odour of oil in the air. There might be rust or corrosion where the legs are welded to the tank. It could be the fuel filter that begins to leak or nozzle plugging that could be a symptom. If they do leak, an oil spill in your basement can be a smelly and messy clean up. If it finds its way into a sump pump or floor drain though, it will undoubtedly make it a very expensive clean up, especially if it gets into wells or ground water systems. If it's an outside storage tank, where rust and corrosion are more common, a spill can contaminate the soil or make its way into nearby streams or rivers. Buried oil tanks are even a greater problem.

Monitoring and regular inspections of existing fuel storage tanks is a must. Replacement of existing tanks with corrosion resistant ones or ensuring the tanks are located within confinement areas is another possible solution. In an initiative to prevent leaks and spills, a partnership involving the Insurance Bureau of Canada, Dalhousie University and private-sector research scientists has resulted in the development of a polymer based coating for new domestic oil tanks that is expected to be in use by late 2002. You can even purchase a sensor for your oil tank will alarm you when it begins to leak.

Did you know? – If you own a fuel tank on your property you have a legal responsibility to properly maintain it and to clean up any spills or leaks that may occur. You are also responsible under the Ontario Environmental Protection Act to report any leak or spill from your tank that causes, or could cause, property damage or health, safety or environmental problems. Compensation resulting from damage to your property (or anyone else's for that matter) as a result of an oil spill can be costly and you may not be fully covered for it under your homeowners' insurance policy. In fact, now some Canadian insurance companies are restricting / limiting coverage or not providing coverage at all to homeowners with fuel storage tanks.

How can you reduce your chances of an oil spill? – [1] Have new tanks installed by a registered contractor (under the *Energy Act of Ontario*). Inspecting it regularly can help you avoid the problems associated with oil spills and leakage. Homeowners are required to ensure their tanks are approved, that is, that they fulfill minimum requirements to avoid tank failure as stipulated in the Energy Act. All basement and aboveground tanks should be accessible for inspection. [2] For existing basement and above-ground tanks (a) inspect your tank for leaks at least once every year (b) replace your tank if it is more than 30 years old or if you are unsure of its age (3) empty any unused tanks [3] For existing underground tanks it is recommended that you replace your underground tank with an above-ground tank to allow for easier detection of problems. If your tank is underground (a) hire a registered contractor to inspect your tank for leaks at least once a year (b) empty unused tanks (c) if your underground tank has not been used for two or more years or you no longer intend to use it, you are legally required to remove it and also remove any contaminated soil.

As of May 2002, all fuel storage tanks must be inspected before filled unless they were inspected during the past ten years according to the Technical Standards & Safety Association (TSSA).

Atlantic Canada Leads The Way

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador report that approximately 66,000 households use fuel oil as their main source of heat. During the 2000 / 2001 heating season, there were approximately 600 residential oil spills reported. That was double the number from the previous year. For the period January 1 to May 10, 2001, it was estimated that insurance companies processed 340 claims associated with domestic oil spills with costs totaling approximately \$9 million. In 2000, there were 220 claims, while from 1996-1999, the claim total was 610. The Insurance Bureau of Canada reports that between 1996 and 1998, the total dollars paid out in claims from domestic oil tank leaks and spills in Atlantic Canada exceeded \$11.9 million, ranking as the sixth-highest category of claims made by consumers, after fire, wind and water damage, burglary, and liability. It's true that Quebec and Atlantic Canada have a greater concentration of oil tanks than in other parts of Canada but all Canadians with fuel storage tanks should take heed. The clean up costs for an environmental spill from a leaking fuel storage tank is staggering and now some Canadian insurance companies are restricting / limiting coverage or not providing coverage at all to homeowners with fuel storage tanks.

Earlier this year, Prince Edward Island became the first province in Canada to institute regulations regarding domestic oil tank installations. When fully implemented, the PEI regulations will ensure that a licensed installer installs oil tanks and a licensed installer, or inspector, inspects existing systems. All tanks will be replaced every 15 – 25 years depending on the tank design and thickness.



PLEASE POST

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