

Domestic Oil Spills, what do I do if this happens to me?

Due to the rural nature of North Norfolk, a high proportion of properties are reliant on heating oil as a fuel for heating their homes. Many of these homes will store fuels within external tanks which, due to their nature, are vulnerable to accidental damage and in some cases can leak due to poor maintenance. As a consequence, each year North Norfolk District Council receives a number of notifications regarding spillages of heating oil, a high proportion of which directly affect domestic properties.



Heating oil is classed as a hazardous substance and is toxic to humans and organisms in the wider environment. Large spillages of oil can have serious implications for human health, ground water, surface water and general wildlife. These implications make it important for users of heating oil to maintain and monitor the condition of their heating oil tanks.

How do I know if my tank has been leaking?

There are a number of obvious indicators to a leaking oil tank and, if present, would certainly be noticeable during a general inspection. Some of those indicators to look out for are listed below:

- If the fuel level in your tank drops significantly over a short period of time and cannot be explained by normal use, then this may suggest a leaking tank.
- Detection of significant oil odours in and around your property; this, for instance, could be where your tank or boiler is located or where the fuel pipe enters your home.
- Detecting a taste of oil in your drinking water.
- Staining on ground surfaces and the presence of oily residues in and around your tank or boiler.
- Presence of discoloured or dead vegetation in and around your oil tank or oil pipe.

Who should I contact if I suspect that my tank has been leaking?

Local Authority:

Notify the North Norfolk Environmental Protection Team immediately if you suspect that your tank has been leaking. Once notified they will send out an Environmental Protection Officer to inspect your property to establish the situation.

Please be aware that the responsibility for land remediation following a spill ultimately lies with the land owner. You will be responsible for incurring costs and contacting the appropriate organisations.

Failure to act can have potential implications for your health, the wider environment, the value of your property and could potentially have severe legal implications, especially if neighbouring properties or individuals are affected.

Insurance Company:

It is important that you contact your home insurance company for advice and to determine your level of cover. Most Insurance companies will provide cover for losses of oil, but may not provide assistance for clean up or remediation work.

Water Service providers:

In the event that you have detected oil in your drinking water or suspect that your water services have been contaminated, it is important that you contact the local water service provider immediately.

Home owners who identify a problem via their water supply, generally detect unpleasant odours or find that their water is tainted by an oily taste. In most cases this is due to the water service pipes coming into contact with sources of heating oil in the ground.

Anglian Water provide a certain degree of guidance to home owners on these issues (see links below) and as part of this procedure, will notify the nearest Environmental Health department when dealing with a suspected spill.

<http://www.anglianwater.co.uk/household/water-quality/healthy/fuel/>
http://www.anglianwater.co.uk/assets/media/Contaminated_Land_brochure.pdf
http://www.anglianwater.co.uk/assets/media/AW141_03-09.pdf

In most cases Anglian Water will seek to resolve the situation as quickly as possible, this usually involves the replacement of affected water mains, **however the responsibility for the replacement of water services within the domestic boundary will ultimately remain with the home owner.** If you find yourself in this situation it is important that you contact your Environmental Health Department immediately for further guidance, as the spill may have implications for your property and the wider environment.

Environment Agency:

The Environment Agency deals with all matters relating to ground water pollution and it is important that they are made aware of any potential spillages where sources of surface or ground water are under threat. The nature of a domestic oil spill, depending upon the environmental setting, can have serious implications for sources of ground water and surface water. The Environment Agency can be contacted via their incident report hotline:

Telephone: 0800 807060 (Freephone, 24 hour service)

What happens next?

If it is determined that a significant oil spill has occurred you will be advised to appoint a suitably qualified, experienced and independent person/company to undertake an investigation/assessment to determine the extent of contamination and to undertake remediation work to resolve the situation.

If you are unfortunate in that your water services are affected by oil contamination, then you will be advised to replace your existing water service pipes with hydrocarbon resistant pipes.