

## ***Removing Your Underground Heating Oil Tank*** (from MADEP Fact Sheet)

If your heating oil storage tank is buried underground, you probably know already that a leak could be very unfortunate - not only for the environment, but for your pocketbook. When an underground storage tank or connected piping leaks, the cleanup can be costly. And if your insurance policy contains a "pollution exclusion" clause, which many do, you could get stuck with the bill. The best way to avoid significant expenses later is to have your tank taken out of the ground now and have a new tank installed in your basement, garage or storage shed. You probably have questions about what this would involve.

For tank removals in Massachusetts, local fire officials issue the necessary permits, determine when conditions are safe for excavation, and respond to emergencies or public safety hazards. When tanks are found to be leaking, additional work is usually needed to determine the extent of the problem and whether cleanup will be required. Contamination should be reported to the local fire department and, in some instances, to DEP. State law does not require the removal of a residential underground tank if it isn't leaking, but there may be local requirements in your community. Check with your fire department or health board.

### **Why should I consider removing my underground storage tank?**

Many underground home heating oil tanks are the same type of 275-gallon bare steel tanks you have probably seen in basements or garages. These tanks were not designed to be buried and, if left in place, will eventually rust and leak. Even larger tanks that were specifically designed for underground use can leak if they do not have adequate corrosion protection. If you notice an unexplainable sharp increase in your home heating oil consumption, your tank may be leaking. But that information alone is not always an accurate indicator. In some cases, leaks are found even after homeowners see their oil consumption drop. While your underground tank probably is not leaking yet, the odds of a leak happening increase as the tank gets older. Even small, slow leaks can pose serious threats to your family, your neighbors and the environment if they go undiscovered for a long time. And, if your tank does leak, you may face a costly cleanup. Having your underground storage tank removed now can save you both money and anguish in the long run.

**How much does an underground tank removal cost?**

Removal contractors generally charge between \$1,000 and \$2,500 depending on the size of the tank, its condition, and how easily it can be reached. Usually not included in this price are the cost of a replacement tank, sampling and testing, cleanup work if a leak is found, and landscaping after the removal is complete.

**Can I test my tank for leaks instead of digging it up?**

Yes, but it may cost you less to simply remove your tank from the ground. It is important to consider that no test can predict what will happen next year, next month, or even the next day. Your money may be better spent on tank removal since you will have to dig the tank up anyway if the test reveals it is leaking.

**Can I just empty the oil from my tank and leave it underground?**

Yes - but only in limited conditions and only if your local fire department approves. Typically, leaving a tank in place will be allowed only if its removal will jeopardize the structural integrity of your building. Even if the fire department lets you leave your tank in place, you will need to have it cleaned and filled with sand or concrete, and the area around it checked for contamination. Getting this done will cost about the same as having your tank removed from the ground. In addition, should you decide to sell your home, a bank or the buyer may ask for more environmental testing or the removal of the tank, which could make leaving your tank in place costlier than taking it out of the ground at the start.

**How will I know if my tank has leaked?**

Contamination may be indicated by signs of a damaged tank or piping, soil that is stained or gives off strong oil odors, a sheen on the groundwater, or environmental test results. Under state law, a measurement for contamination is required within 24 hours of a tank removal. So before work even begins, make sure the contractor has the necessary expertise to make such a measurement. The basic inspection is a sight, smell and physical check of the tank and the surrounding soil. Sampling and analysis is recommended if the tank is located near any wells, drinking water supplies, wetlands, ponds or streams, or if there are any indications that contamination is present.

**What if contamination is found?**

First, don't panic. The problem could be minor and relatively simple to correct. Simply remember the importance of notifying the proper officials and taking the appropriate cleanup actions right away. Addressing the problem now will prevent unnecessary cost and damage later. If you find contamination or even suspect there has been a leak, contact the nearest DEP regional office. Also notify your local fire department, which will help you and your contractor determine what needs to be done next. While not all leaks must be reported to DEP, it is recommended that you contact the agency for help in determining whether the level of contamination found makes reporting necessary in your individual case and what next steps are necessary.