

Heating oil

This leaflet provides information on how
to maintain and resolve problems with
your oil heating system.



Maintenance and resolving problems

What checks can I do on my heating oil tank?

You should ensure that your heating oil tank is serviced once a year by a registered Oil Firing Technical Association (OFTEC) registered technician. You can find registered technicians at www.oftec.co.uk

There are also some simple checks and precautions you can take yourself to ensure your tank is in a good condition:

- Inspect the tank for any signs of damage such as bulging, deep scratches, cracks, discolouration, rust or large dents.
- Look out for any oil that has leaked out of the tank, especially around pipes, valves and seams.
- Make sure that any external protection isn't filled with large amounts of water, oil, rubbish or plants.
- Ensure access to and around the tank is clear and don't allow plants to grow anywhere near it.
- Make sure vents, gauges and access points are closed and protected so that rainwater, insects or dirt can't get into them.
- Ensure gauges and alarms are

working correctly including any batteries. Ensure to follow manufacturers instructions.

- Keep an oil spill kit with drain blockers, leak-sealing putty and cloths/sponges.
- Only fill your tank to around 80-90% of its capacity to avoid overfilling and ensure your tank has an overflow protection device or alarm.
- All heating oil tanks should have the correct protection around them, such as a bund (secondary containment), according to regulations. The amount of protection varies across the UK and depending on where your tank is situated.
- Oil tanks should not be located next to any combustible structure such as sheds or boundary fences.



- If it is a metal tank, ensure it is painted regularly to avoid the metal corroding.
- If possible, supervise any deliveries of oil. Make sure you do not order more oil than you can fit in your tank.
- Monitor and become familiar with your normal usage rate of oil. If consumption appears to go up, check for leaks immediately. There have been instances where people have re-filled a leaking oil tank without checking when their last delivery was, doubling the amount of oil lost into the ground without realising. The more oil lost, the more difficult and expensive the clean up.
- Be aware of black staining on tank supports or bases as this may indicate a leak.
- Be aware of any oily smells. This may indicate a leak.
- Fuel supply lines and valves attached to the tank should also be protected from accidental damage.

Oil is toxic and harmful to the environment which includes animals, plants and water sources. It is an offence to cause pollution so any problems should be fixed immediately by a professional. In the case of oil escaping the tank, you should call the Scottish

Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) immediately on **01473 626298** www.sepa.org.uk

The cost of cleaning up oil spills can be very expensive therefore you should contact your insurance company immediately. You should have insurance that covers:

- The cost of cleaning up your property and/or neighbouring land
- Cost of replacing lost, stolen or leaked oil
- Environmental clean up for accidental loss

Please be aware that not all insurance policies cover oil leakage and some might not cover the cost of remedial works if the homeowner doesn't take steps to prevent or deal with the leakage at the earliest opportunity.

Other insurance companies state that the fuel tank and the heating system must be inspected by a qualified professional every 12 months.

For rented accommodation the landlord and the insurance company should be notified of any incident.

If you need to change your current tank, it's important that you get one that is manufactured to Oftec standards.

Water or sludge in your heating oil tank

Sludge or water in your heating oil tank can block pipe-work, damage or corrode heating systems and reduce the efficacy of the oil.

Water can come from rainfall when taking delivery of new oil or due to condensation. You should take precautions to ensure any damage is fixed and openings are closed. Consult your delivery driver to ensure that they also take adequate precautions.

Sludge tends to build up in tanks where oil has been stored for lengthy periods of time.

An appropriate contractor can remove water and sludge and clean your tank as well as work out why any problems you've experienced have happened and fix them.

Heating oil theft

Heating oil is expensive and can be attractive to thieves.

General tips to protect your fuel include:

- Check oil levels frequently so you are aware if anyone has tampered with your supply and consider an electronic oil level gauge which sets off an audible alarm in your house if the oil level drops below a quarter full.



- Fit a good quality locking device to all fuel tanks – a high quality closed shackle padlock will make access using bolt croppers very difficult. Buying products that carry the ‘Sold Secure’ logo which are tested to withstand attack is advisable.
- Consider perimeter security for the whole tank, such as a metal cage or fencing. Even a prickly hedge may help deter thieves. However, remember that the oil tanker driver will need to access it.
- Control switches should be located in a secure building and turned off when the tank is not in use.
- If you’re installing an oil tank or considering repositioning it, they should ideally be situated within sight of nearby occupied buildings. It may not be so aesthetically desirable but, the more remote, the better the opportunity to access the tank without being seen.
- Consider appropriate lighting around the tank so you can see and anyone can be seen. Be considerate to your neighbours and don’t use high powered lights which affect their property.

Heating oil in winter

Regularly check how much oil you have left as you don’t want to be running out in cold weather - especially on those occasions when a supplier can’t get to you, such as during periods of heavy snowfall.

Order more oil before your supply gets less than a quarter full. To avoid risks and save money, order the majority of your oil in summer then simply top up in early winter before the weather gets worse.

Try to avoid running out of oil as the boiler is likely to need re-priming resulting in additional expense.

If you run out of oil unexpectedly, contact your supplier. If they can’t reach you with an oil delivery they may have small supplies you can collect from a depot if you can get there.

Heating oil supplier problems

Some heating oil customers have complained that suppliers have changed the price of a heating oil order between it being ordered and delivered. You have the same consumer rights when you buy heating oil as you do most other goods and services. If your supplier makes a mistake or tries to change

the agreed price, you can take action against them.

To reduce the risk of getting a shock when your heating order bill arrives, always get a written confirmation of the order including quantity, cost and delivery times. If you order by phone this is classed as 'distance selling' so your supplier must give you certain information such as your right to cancel.

To further help avoid problems, ensure your supplier has written confirmation of where your tank is and how to get to it.

Oil boiler maintenance

An annual boiler safety check and boiler service, carried out by a professional service engineer, ensures that your boiler is functioning properly. Regular servicing of your boiler is important as it ensures that the boiler is working to the specifications designed by the boiler manufacturer. This will help prolong the life of the boiler as well as reduce the risk of faults and expensive repairs further down the line.

Carbon monoxide

As with any fossil fuel burning appliance, poor or inadequate servicing can cause the generation of carbon monoxide. Therefore, it is absolutely vital that your oil boiler is checked and serviced at least annually.

Carbon monoxide is a highly toxic poisonous gas. It is odourless, colourless and tasteless and therefore difficult to detect.

Always install a carbon monoxide detector and test regularly in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions

For more information contact the Private Sector Housing Team at

private.housing@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Tel: **01467 534753**



