

Oil Storage Regulations - all you need to know about the safe storage of heating oil

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What are Oil Storage Regulations and what do they cover?

Depending on where you live, how much oil you are storing and the type of installation, different rules may apply.

In England and Wales, the safe storage of oil up to 2,500 litres supplying a single family dwelling is classed as domestic storage, and is covered by Part J of the Building Regulations.

Anything above 2,500 litres in England is covered by the Control of Pollution Regulations, which also applies where more than 200 litres of oil is stored outside and above ground at commercial premises.

In Scotland, new regulations are set to take effect in 2006 as part of the Water Environment Oil Storage (Scotland) Regulations. These will be similar to the Control of Pollution Regulations already in existence for England.

All of the regulations are designed to help reduce oil spillages and encourage safe and responsible oil storage. Since the Control of Pollution regulations were first introduced in England, there has been a significant reduction in the number of oil spillages and oil pollution incidents.

What rules affect a domestic dwelling?

Under Part J in England and Wales, the most common decision is whether to use a single skin or bunded tank. There is a huge choice of oil tanks available in every conceivable shape and size, with both metal and plastic options available. Metal tanks are regarded as the more traditional choice, with plastic tanks arriving on the scene about 15-20 years ago. Both are still widely used throughout the industry.

Bunded fuel centre



A bund is secondary containment for a tank, and must be capable of holding 110% of its contents. A bund can either be built separately, or be integral to the tank – so you can buy bunded tanks which are essentially a tank within a tank!

In order to keep oil pollution to a minimum, Part J states that a bunded tank should be used for all new domestic installations. That is unless it can be proved in accordance with a risk assessment (such as OFTEC's TI/133P) that omitting a secondary containment system will NOT increase the risk of pollution. So there will always be situations where you can use a single skin tank.

Different properties in different areas will have special features, and they must be assessed individually on each occasion. If any of the following points apply to a domestic site, then the tank must be bunded:

- tank capacity is greater than 2500 litres
- is sited within 10m of 'controlled water' such as a stream, ditch, river, lake, natural pond, canal or coastal water
- is sited where any oil spillage could run into an open drain or loose fitting manhole cover
- is sited within 50m of a well, borehole or spring
- is sited over hard ground or hard surfaced ground that could allow any spilled oil to reach 'controlled water'
- is sited where the tank vent pipe outlet cannot be seen from the fill point
- if there is any other potential hazard individual to the site

If there is a spillage, the Environment Agency may become involved and can prosecute the householder and hold them liable for the clean up costs.

All new tank installations must comply with Building Regulations. If the installer carrying out the work is OFTEC Registered, he can self certify his work and register it with the local authority. If the work is done by a contractor who is not registered, then building control must be notified before the work is started, and an inspection of the final work arranged.

So what about commercial premises?

Where more than 200 litres is stored outside and above ground at a commercial premises, this is covered by the Control of Pollution Regulations in England, and will very soon be covered by similar legislation in Scotland.

Those affected include businesses, schools, churches, hospitals, museums, offices, warehouses and others who store oil in substantial quantities for heating. It also applied to domestic premises (single family dwellings) storing over 3,500 litres of oil.

The Control of Pollution Regulations for England were introduced in three phases, and signalled a move towards the use of bunding for any commercial premises.

- From 1st March 2002 any new installations had to be bunded
- From 1st September 2003 any existing oil storage



Vertical filling

installations deemed to be 'at significant risk' had to be banded

- From 1st September 2005, all existing and new oil storage installations had to be banded

What about Farms?

Oil is commonly used on farms for many different purposes: domestic heating for the farmhouse or dwellings, commercial heating for

greenhouses, and even for storing fuel for vehicles or farm machinery.

For the farmhouse, Part J of the Building Regulations will apply in England and Wales. For the greenhouse situation, the Control of Pollution Regulations will apply in England. For fuel supplying vehicles such as tractors, storage tanks are covered by The Control of Pollution (Silage, Slurry and Agricultural Fuel Oil) Regulations 1991 in England. Under these regulations, tanks must be banded if they are above 1500 litres (single tank) or multiple tanks. Single tanks under 1500 litres are not covered by the regulations, which apply to all new tanks installed after 1991.

Do tanks require any maintenance?

All oil storage tanks should be checked on a regular basis, and OFTEC is encouraging technicians to check them annually when appliances such as boilers are traditionally serviced. Modern plastic tanks do not need any maintenance as a general rule.

What qualifications are needed to fit oil tanks?

Because oil is deemed safer than gas, registration with a competent persons body such as OFTEC is not mandatory – unlike CORGI for gas. However, it is recommended because you can then self certify your work saving expensive Building Control fees and hassle. The OFT600 qualification focuses on oil storage and designed specifically for tank installers.

Where can I find out more information?

OFTEC has a wealth of resource on the regulations on its website, and you can also find out more about the Building Regulations on the government's website at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). The Environment agency in England also has some good information, as does the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).

Conclusion

Both the Building Regulations and Control of Pollution Regulations have had an extremely positive effect in

terms of reducing oil spillages. However, regular maintenance checks on oil storage and ancillary equipment should help detect any potential problems before they occur. Looking after oil storage will help reduce the risk of pollution occurring, and can save money from lost oil and clean up costs.

Further information is available from the following websites.

www.oftec.org

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

www.sepa.org.uk

If you are training for a career in the plumbing and heating industry and wish to know more about membership of the CIPHE, please phone the Membership Department on 01708 463108 or email membership@ciphe.org.uk.

