

# RESIDENTIAL UNDERGROUND STORAGE TANKS

Residential underground storage tanks have been installed and used in Canada for over 60 years. They can typically be found in homes built before 1970. Many of these storage tanks are now abandoned or unused, as alternative heating sources – such as natural gas, propane, and electricity – have become available.

## ***How do I know if I have an underground storage tank?***

Signs that you may still have an underground storage tank on your property include a filler cap in the yard, a vent pipe up the side of the house, or possibly copper feed lines coming through by a furnace. Property owners may wish to have their property inspected, in order to identify any heating oil tanks and to minimize the risk of leaks or spills



## ***Reasons a property owner may remove their residential heating oil storage tank***

- due diligence
- improve the environmental conditions of their property
- remove high risk conditions
- avoid a negative impact to property value
- satisfy a lender, prospective purchaser, or insurance agent

Underground storage tanks are a potential source of contamination of soil and groundwater. Up to 25% of tanks that get removed have oil seepage issues. They also pose a fire and explosion hazard under certain conditions.

## ***Frequently Asked Questions***

### **Who is responsible for the regulations surrounding removal of underground storage tanks?**

The City and the Ministry of Environment do not specifically regulate residential heating oil storage tanks, however all property owners in B.C. under provincial jurisdiction are legally responsible for complying with the provincial Environmental Management Act. Under the Act, the current owner or a previous owner of the site may be responsible for cleaning up a contaminated site.

### **Do I need a permit from the City to remove an underground storage tank?**

No, you do not need permission or a permit from the City for removal of a storage tank.

**Does the City provide compensation for the costs of removing an underground storage tank?**

No, the City is not accountable for tank removal or cleanup costs incurred by a property owner.

**Instead of removing the storage tank, can I have the oil removed and the tank filled with sand?**

This is a procedure that will reduce the risk of contamination; however, it does not completely eliminate the source. For this reason, it may not be of satisfaction to someone who is inspecting the property or interested in buying it.

**Does the City know if I have an underground tank?**

The City does have some property records with an underground storage tank installation report; however, if there is no report for your property it does not guarantee that there is no storage tank present. The City is not responsible for confirming whether there is or is not a storage tank on your property.

**Do property owners have legal obligations related to storage tanks?**

All underground storage tanks over 2500 L, that supply oil burning equipment on properties under provincial jurisdiction are regulated under the BC Fire Code (BCFC). A provision in the BCFC states that an owner is required to follow good engineering practices when removing, abandoning in place, or temporarily taking out of service, his or her residential heating oil storage tank. Examples of good engineering practices are listed in the Appendix of the BCFC, and include Part 9 of the “Environmental Code of Practice for Aboveground and Underground Storage Tank Systems Containing Petroleum and Allied Petroleum Products” published by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment. For further information, contact the Office of the Fire Commissioner at [OFC@gov.bc.ca](mailto:OFC@gov.bc.ca) or 1-888-988-9488.

**Am I liable for contamination from a residential heating oil storage tank?**

If you buy a home with a heating oil tank, knowingly or not, you become potentially liable for any future cleanup costs.

**What should I do if I want to remove a heating oil storage tank on my property?**

Unused or abandoned heating oil storage tanks should be properly decommissioned by a qualified contractor. A list of contractors can be found in the yellow pages. Requirements for the decommissioning of out-of-service underground storage tanks are described in the BCFC and the federal Storage Tank Systems for Petroleum Products and Allied Petroleum Products Regulations. A copy of the tank removal report should be sent to the City of Chilliwack Engineering Department for future reference.