

Heating oil underground storage tanks

This fact sheet explains the requirement for underground storage tanks (USTs) containing heating oil.

Note: USTs that are used both for fueling emergency generators and for heating (dual use tanks) are fully regulated. Fact sheets on the UST regulations are located on the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's (MPCA) UST Program webpage.

Which tanks are regulated?

The MPCA regulates USTs larger than 1,100 gallons that are used to store fuel oil for heating the premises where the tank is located. Heating oil tanks of 1,100 gallons or less are not regulated by the MPCA.

Bulk heating oil tanks (storage for distribution rather than for use on the premises) must follow the additional requirements for commercial petroleum tanks.

Tanks containing used oil intended solely for heating the premises where the tank is located follow these heating oil requirements. However, if any used oil is ever pumped from the tank for recycling or re-use elsewhere, the tank must follow the additional requirements for commercial petroleum tanks.

Because heating oil tanks contain a combustible material, they are also regulated under the Minnesota State Fire Code, including tanks of 1,100 gallons or less. For more information contact your local fire department, or visit the State Fire Marshal website at <https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/sfm/Pages/default.aspx>.

What notification is required for tank installation?

Heating oil tanks may only be installed by MPCA certified contractors. At least 10 days in advance of starting tank installation, the contractor or owner must notify the MPCA of the project, using the "Ten-day Advance Notice" form.

Within 30 days after putting the tank into service, the contractor or owner must notify the MPCA of the contents, design, and other tank and facility information using the "UST Notification" form.

Thereafter, the tank owner must re-notify within 30 days after of any change to the tank status or information, such as changing owners or closing the tank. Both forms are available on the UST Program webpage. There is no fee for notification.

What tank and piping designs are required to prevent corrosion?

Heating oil tanks are required to be designed to prevent corrosion and degradation during the life of the tank.

Note: Systems installed prior to August 1, 1985, are exempt from corrosion protection requirements.

Tanks and piping meet corrosion protection requirements if they are made of fiberglass-reinforced plastic (FRP), steel with an FRP jacket, or steel with a cathodic protection system. Piping may use any of these designs, or be made of a flexible nonmetallic material. Tanks and piping may be either single walled or double walled.

Periodic testing of cathodic protection systems for continued effectiveness is highly recommended, but not required.

What about containing spills during tank filling?

At this time, heating oil tanks are not required to follow spill containment requirements. However, the MPCA strongly recommends that tank owners equip heating oil tanks with liquid-tight spill buckets to catch spills that may occur when the delivery hose is disconnected from the fill pipe. Spill buckets should be checked following deliveries and kept clear of fuel, water, and debris.

How do I prevent overfills?

At this time, heating oil tanks are not required to follow overfill prevention requirements. However, the MPCA strongly recommends that tank owners equip heating oil tanks with a device to prevent tanks from being overfilled. There are three overfill prevention options – an automatic shutoff (flapper valve), an audible high-level overfill alarm, or a vent pipe flow restrictor (ball float valve).

Used oil tanks are susceptible to overfilling, because the fill opening is usually located inside a building at a higher elevation than the other openings of the tank. An overfilled tank could have oil leaking out of another opening without being noticed. It is important to make sure that all tank openings are liquid tight.

How do I monitor the tank for leaks?

At this time, heating oil tanks and piping are not required to be monitored for leaks. However, the MPCA strongly recommends that tank owners conduct leak detection, which will help prevent contamination and costly cleanups from a leaking tank or piping.

Tank leak detection methods that can be used include automatic tank gauging, statistical inventory reconciliation, and interstitial monitoring of double-walled tanks. Any sumps should be checked monthly and kept clear of fuel, water, and debris.

The MPCA does not consider leak detection necessary for safe suction piping systems. For other suction systems, the MPCA recommends precision tightness tests every three years, statistical inventory control, or interstitial monitoring of double-walled piping.

What is required when the tank is no longer used?

Contractors who permanently close a heating oil tank must be certified by the MPCA. A list of certified contractors is found on the UST Program website. At least 10 days in advance of beginning permanent closure of the tank, the contractor or owner must notify the MPCA of the tank closure project using the “Ten-day Advance Notice” form. Within 30 days after completing work, the contractor or owner must notify the MPCA using the “UST Notification” form.

At this time, heating oil tanks are not subject to technical closure requirements. However, the MPCA strongly recommends that heating oil tanks be properly closed when taken out of service. An abandoned heating oil tank will eventually leak and collapse as the tank corrodes.

To permanently close a heating oil tank, it may either be closed in place by being filled with grout or a foam that hardens up, or it may be removed from the ground. The tank and piping should first be emptied and cleaned, and the contents disposed of properly. A removed tank should be disposed of properly. A site assessment (soil sampling) in the area of the tank should be performed.

When taking a tank out of service, be sure to remove or permanently cap all fill pipes, and notify your fuel oil supplier that the tank has been taken out of service.

What if the property is sold?

If property containing a heating oil tank is sold, the seller must notify the buyer of the existence of the tanks. Notification must be in writing prior to closing the transaction. It is the buyer's duty to notify the MPCA of the change in ownership.

Is there funding for cleanup?

The Petrofund administered by the Department of Commerce provides up to 90% reimbursement for costs related to petroleum contamination cleanup. Both commercial and residential heating oil USTs are eligible for this funding. If you have questions, you can visit the Petrofund website at <https://mn.gov/commerce/industries/fuel/petrofund/>

Need more information?

Visit the UST Program at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/waste/underground-storage-tank-systems>. The site has forms, fact sheets, and other information about USTs and UST requirements.

You can also call the MPCA at 651-296-6300 or 1-800-657-3864 and ask for the UST Program.