

Heating Oil Release

You have just experienced a release of home heating oil. This fact sheet is designed to assist you in regards to cleanup and restoration activities.

Resources

There are various resources available to you. Depending on the size of the release and the impact resulting from the release, these government agencies and private companies may assist you:

- (1) **The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE).** MDE can provide technical guidance on spill control and removal. MDE's Emergency Response Division can pump out leaking tanks in order to prevent the spread of contamination. MDE can give you guidance on tank maintenance and will enforce Maryland regulations in reference to oil spills and tank management.
- (2) **Your Heating Oil Supplier.** Your heating oil supplier is an excellent resource. Before a release ever occurs, you should find out how your heating oil dealer is equipped to assist you. Some dealers have insurance available through their service contracts. Most dealers have the means to obtain absorbents, soil disposal, cleaning chemicals, manpower and equipment.
- (3) **Local Fire Department.** If the spill has just occurred, in many jurisdictions the local fire department will respond with absorbent material and manpower to contain and control the release. A quick response from the fire department can stop the spread of the spill, resulting in a less complicated cleanup.
- (4) **County Health and Environmental Agency.** Local agencies are often available for technical guidance and, possibly, well water sampling. Local government agencies can assist on difficult decisions regarding water supply impacts and may assist on disposal issues.
- (5) **Private Spill Contractors.** MDE maintains a list of contractors who specialize in oil spill response. These contractors have specialized equipment, tools, and the manpower available for the cleanup of oil releases. There are also companies that can be found in the yellow pages under "Fire and Water Damage Restoration." These companies specialize in odor removal.
- (6) **Insurance Company.** The question, if you are covered for environmental releases, should be checked out long before an incident occurs. Many standard homeowner policies do not cover oil spills. If you do have coverage your agent can assist you on obtaining assistance.

Cleanup

The location of the spill will determine what proper response actions should be taken. A spill outside is handled differently than one in a crawl space or basement. Regardless, dealing with the spill quickly is very important. A quick response can protect your drinking water resource and prevent the spread of the release.

- (1) **Notification.** If oil is flowing from your tank or lines, immediately call 911. The local fire department can respond with material to help contain the spill. You must also call your oil supplier and MDE. MDE's spill reporting number is 1-866-633-4686.
- (2) **Containment.** As soon as a spill is detected, steps should be taken to control and contain the spread of oil. First check to see if closing a valve on the tank will abate the flow of oil. If the flow is minimal, the use of buckets and pans may be enough to catch the oil and prevent it from spreading.

Household materials such as rags, kitty litter, peat moss, and sand can be used as an absorbent and dike building materials. If the tank is located outside, a shovel can be used to build a dike and direct the oil away from your house. Basement sump pumps should be checked for oil. If found, liquid product must be removed from the sump. The sump discharge point should also be inspected for oil contamination.

(3) **Absorbents.** As mentioned above, numerous household items can be used to absorb the spilled oil such as rags, kitty litter, saw dust, peat moss, sand, dirt, even old carpets. Specialized absorbents can be purchased at auto part dealers, marina supply stores, plumbing and hardware stores, your oil supply company, and spill contractors. Once used, absorbent material should be picked up as soon as it is saturated. The material should be placed in doubled plastic bags and removed from your house. It is best to stage the bags on a layer of plastic or in a trash can to prevent contaminating another area of your property.

(4) **Odors.** One of the most troubling results of a heating oil release is the odor produced by the spill. If not addressed quickly, these odors can linger for months and make your house unlivable. Many people have allergic reactions to the odor and suffer breathing problems and skin rashes. The first line of attack is to remove as much oil saturated material as possible. This includes absorbents used to contain the spill and any other item that has been in contact with the oil, such as carpet, paneling, and any items that may have been stored in the area of the release. If the spill was on soil, as much of the impacted soil as possible should be removed. The next step is aeration; as many windows and doors as possible should be opened. Fans should be used to pull the odors out of the house, basement, or crawl space. If the spill is under a house trailer, the skirting should be removed for aeration purposes. Be prepared to aerate for a long period of time, this could mean days or even weeks.

There are several household products that can be used to wash down an affected area. This will require several washing and rinsing operations. You should see the odors decrease after each application. Typical products that have been found to be effective include: Dawn Dishwashing Liquid, Simple Green, and White Vinegar. These solutions should be used individually and mixed with water as hot as you can handle. Whichever solution you mix, add a four-ounce bottle of Pure Vanilla Extract to assist further with odor control. Once applied, a rinse of fresh water should be used to remove the solution. If possible, the rinse water should be collected in towels or somehow diverted from inside the house. Always be careful not to contaminate new areas of your home.

Commercially available powders and sprays can be purchased that break down and mask oil odor. One commonly used by oil companies is called *Odor Gone*. These powders are spread on the stained area and left for several days. They should then be removed and reapplied if necessary. You can also make your own powder by mixing 10 parts powdered Tide to 1 part baking soda. Spread this powder on the stained area and let sit for several days. Reapply if necessary. Sprays such as boat bilge cleaners have been proven effective on staining and odorous problems. Be careful to use these products as directed by the manufacturer.

In a bad spill situation, you will find that you will have to perform the tasks above several times to make your home odor free. In a worse case situation, all building materials that have been in contact with the oil will have to be removed. It is important to act as quickly as possible. You must realize results will not be immediate, but will take time and persistence.

(5) **Environmental impacts.** These impacts are those outside of your home. It may be saturated soil or liquid product in a drain or ditch. Maryland law requires that environmental impacts be reported to MDE. If left unabated, they can result in impacts to neighboring properties and contamination of drinking water supplies. Some environmental impacts can be addressed in the same way as you would address a spill in your home. Quick reaction is critical. Liquid oil should be absorbed or pumped away. Saturated material should be removed. In the case of a leaking underground storage tank, monitoring wells and

groundwater recovery may be required. A professional oil spill contractor, under MDE's oversight, best handles this type of spill best.

(6) **Disposal.** Most local solid waste facilities will accept oil spill material from residences in that jurisdiction. You should call the facility to verify their acceptance. If necessary, an oil spill contractor or heating oil supplier can arrange disposal of saturated material.

As you can see, an oil spill at your home is a major problem. MDE recommends that prevention of oil spills should be practice by all homeowners. MDE has several fact sheets on tank operation and maintenance available through our Oil Control Program. Your oil supply company can also assist you with proper tank management.