

Recommended Practices for Closure of Residential Heating Oil Underground Storage Tanks

Residential heating oil underground storage tanks (USTs) used for the storage of heating oil typically have a life expectancy of approximately 10 years due to tank corrosion. Actual tank life is highly unpredictable and may vary widely depending on soil conditions and specific tank installation practices. The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) estimates that approximately 20% to 25% of all bare steel USTs that remain in the ground are leaking. NHDES recommends that all residential heating oil USTs be removed or closed in place.

NHDES recommends the following procedures to close a residential UST:

1. The tank system may be removed or closed in place. Removal is generally recommended whenever possible to avoid future problems or questions concerning the UST.
2. All product, liquid and sludge should be removed from the tank system. This includes the contents of the tank and associated piping.
3. The tank should be tested for explosive vapors and rendered free of such vapors. A trained professional who is knowledgeable in tank closing procedures should perform this testing.
4. If the tank is closed in place, it must be filled with an inert material (sand, cement, etc.). Care must be taken to ensure that no voids remain and that none will develop through settling of the fill material. For a list of tank closure contractors that frequently do business in New Hampshire, please call NHDES at (603) 271-3899. Again, the preferred method of closure is removal whenever possible.
5. Determine if the tank has leaked by evaluating the soil located under the tank for petroleum contamination. NHDES recommends that a soil sample be collected from beneath the tank and analyzed for petroleum compounds by an accredited laboratory. If contamination is discovered, you must immediately notify NHDES at (603) 271-3899 or State Police at (603) 223-4381.
6. Disposal of excavated tanks must occur in the proper manner. For guidance on the proper disposal practices for tanks, contact NHDES Spill Response at (603) 271-3899.

Notification, “Contaminated Sites Management” Env-Or 604.06

Any responsible party or other person having knowledge of a discharge of oil shall report such discharge to the NHDES Waste Management Division immediately (603) 271-3899 (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.), or to the NH State Police Dispatch at (603) 223-4381 (24 hours/day), unless all five of the following conditions are met:

1. The discharge is less than 25 gallons;
2. The discharge is immediately contained;
3. The discharge and/or contamination is completely removed within 24 hours;
4. There is no impact or potential impact to groundwater or surface water;
5. There is no potential for vapors which pose an imminent threat to human health.

IMPORTANT!

During closure, if petroleum contamination is discovered around your UST, state funding may be available to help pay for costs associated with the investigation and cleanup of the contamination. For additional information concerning available funding, see fact sheet WMD-REM-15 “The Fuel Oil Discharge Cleanup Fund for On-Premise-Use Heating Oil Users,” or call (603) 271-3899. All releases of petroleum products to the environment that pollute or have the potential of polluting the surface or groundwater of the state must be reported to NHDES immediately.

DISCLAIMER: Information contained in this fact sheet is current as of July 28, 2020. Statutory or regulatory changes that may occur after that date may cause part or all of the information to become invalid. If there are any questions concerning the current status of this information, please contact us at (603) 271-3899.