



Removing an Underground Heating Oil Tank

If your home heating oil storage tank is buried under ground, you probably know already that a leak could be very unfortunate - not only for the environment, but for your pocketbook. When an underground storage tank or connected piping leaks, the cleanup can be costly. And if your homeowner's policy contains a "pollution exclusion" clause, which many do, you could get stuck with the bill.

The best way to avoid significant expenses later is to have your tank taken out of the ground now and have a new tank installed in your basement, garage, or storage shed, and within a "dike". When tanks are found to be leaking, additional work is usually needed to determine the extent of the problem and whether cleanup will be required. While a small leak and contamination may be reported to the local fire department, a **catastrophic spill** should be immediately reported to the fire department and the **Emergency Response Team** at **800-928-2380**.



This picture of the contaminated soil from a leaking underground storage tank includes the covering over the soil to prevent further contamination during cleanup. This soil will be placed in a landfill certified for petroleum contaminated soil.

What should I do about a tank that is no longer is use?

While the State of Kentucky does not require that an unused heating oil tank be properly closed, the state recommends that once a tank is out of service, it should be removed from the ground, or properly closed. An unused tank is one where:

- ◆ You have stopped using oil as a heating source;
- ◆ You have replaced the tank with a new one.

At the time you convert from oil to another heating source or sell your home, you should:

- ◆ Use a licensed contractor to empty all remaining oil from your underground tank and properly dispose of the oil either by recycling or reuse;
- ◆ Either fill the tank with an inert substance, replace the tank with a new tank, or remove the tank completely;

Be sure to keep all receipts from the transaction to use as proof that your tank has been properly closed or abandoned. If you empty the tank, but do not properly close it, you must leave the tank

vent lines in place and open. When you sell your home or business, you should:

- ◆ Ensure that any abandoned heating oil tank on your property is empty of oil; and
- ◆ Provide documentation to the buyer showing that the tank has been emptied and/or has been properly closed.

Why should I consider removing my underground storage tank?

Many underground home heating oil tanks are the same type of 275 gallon bare steel tanks you have probably seen in basements or garages. These tanks were not designed to be buried, and, if left in place long enough, will eventually rust and leak. Even larger tanks that were specifically designed for underground use can leak if they do not have adequate corrosion protection.

If you notice an unexplainable sharp increase in your home heating oil consumption, your tank may be leaking. But that information alone is not always an accurate indicator. In some cases, leaks are found even after homeowners see their oil consumption drop.



While your underground tank probably is not leaking yet, the odds of a leak happening increase as the tank gets older. Even small, slow leaks can pose serious threats to your family, your neighbors, and the environment if they go undiscovered for a long time. And, if your tank does leak, you may face a costly cleanup. Having your underground storage tank removed now can save you both money and anguish in the long run.

How much does an underground tank removal cost?

Removal contractors generally charge between \$800 and \$3,500 depending on the size of the tank, its condition, and how easily it can be reached. The Tank Removal Checklist includes a summary of the services that your contractor should provide for this price. Usually not included in the price are the costs of a replacement tank, sampling and testing, cleanup work if a leak is found, and landscaping after the removal is complete.

For the best price, shop around and get cost estimates from several licensed contractors. They can provide you with a fairly accurate cost estimate by visiting your home to determine both where your tank is located and whether there are any obstacles to getting the job done. Remember that costs can escalate if your tank has leaked, and get a cost estimate for that contingency. Compare services the companies can provide and be sure to check references. As with any substantial home improvement job, get a written cost estimate and a contract that outlines the services to be performed before work begins.

Can I test my tank for leaks instead of digging it up?

Yes, especially if the tank is currently in use. It is important to consider that no test can predict what will happen next year, next month, or even the next day. If you are considering selling your house, you may save money by removing the tank and installing a new, aboveground tank in your basement, garage, or shed. In addition, you may have to dig up your tank if it is found to be leaking anyway. Information on tank tightness testing can be obtained from companies that perform tank tests.

Can I just empty the oil from my tank and leave it underground?

Yes, under certain conditions. First, if removing the tank will undermine the structural integrity of your home, you may have no choice but to leave it in the ground, properly abandoned. Second, the tank must be pumped out, cleaned, and filled with an inert material, (clean sand or cement).

Getting this done may cost about the same as having your tank removed from the ground. In addition, should you decide to sell your home, a bank or the buyer may ask for more environmental testing or the removal of the tank, which could make leaving your tank in place costlier than taking it out of the ground at the start.

How will I know if my tank has leaked?

Complete a visual inspection of the tank vent, piping, and surrounding soil. If the tank or piping is damaged, a leak is more likely to have occurred. Soil that is stained or gives off a strong oil odor, rainbow-colored product sheen on standing water after it has rained, or dead vegetation is also a good indicator that contamination has occurred.

Use the accompanying checklist, WHPP 910, to follow the steps that need to be taken to measure contamination. *Sampling and analysis of the soil around an underground tank and piping is recommended if your tank is located within the Wellhead Protection Area, near any water wells, wetlands, ponds or streams, or if there is any indication that contamination is present.*

What if contamination is found?

First, don't panic. The problem could be minor and relatively simple to correct. Simply remember to notify the proper officials and take the appropriate cleanup actions right away. Addressing the problem now will prevent unnecessary and higher costs later.

For catastrophic spills:

- ◆ **Dial 911** for the Louisville Metro Area Hazardous Materials Response Team.
- ◆ Call the Kentucky Emergency Response Team
800-928-2380

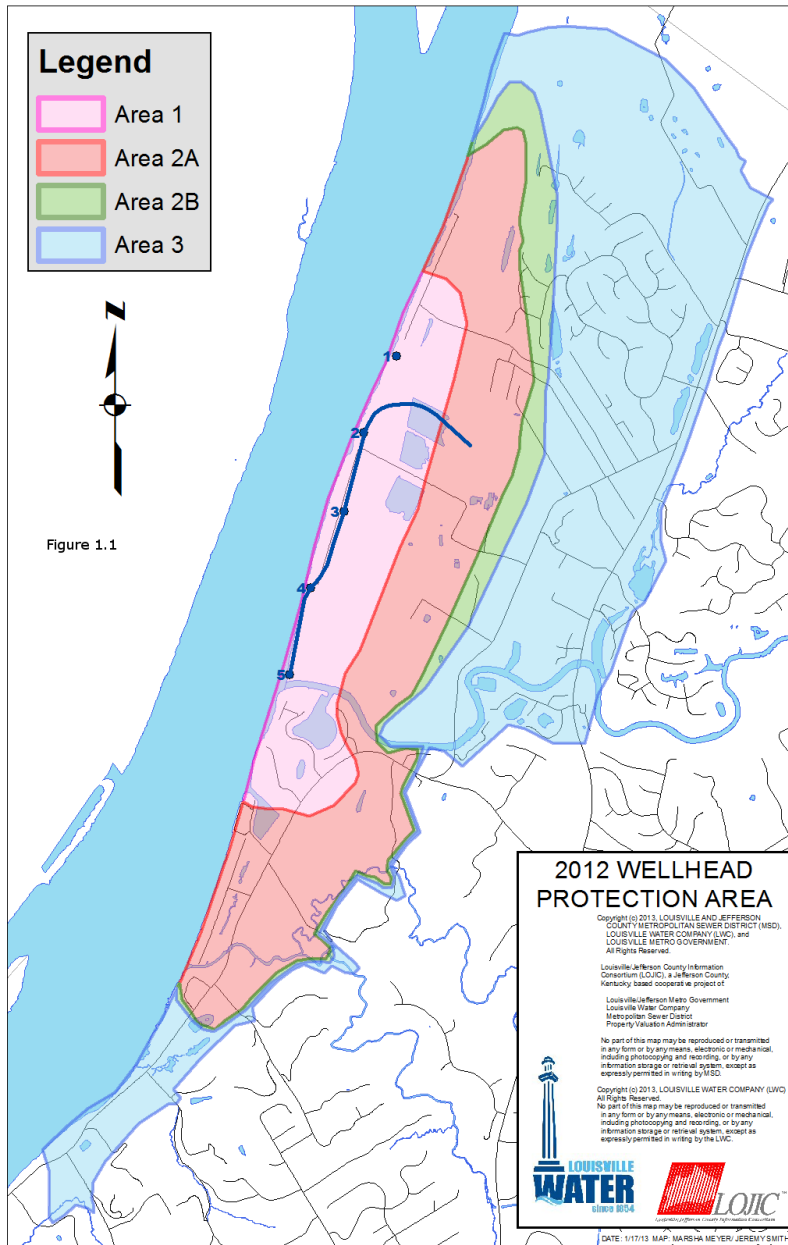
For slow leaks and small contamination problems, call your local fire protection district.

Where is the Wellhead Protection Area?

The Wellhead Protection Area is located near Prospect, Kentucky. This area has been specifically designated by the Louisville Water Company as an area to be protected in order to prevent contamination from entering the public water supply well at the B. E. Payne Plant. If you live within this area, you must take greater care to prevent contamination to protect the aquifer that supplies the well. (Please review the map on the next page.)

Other areas for concern include sites that are near drinking water wells, livestock wells, or irrigation wells; wetlands areas, and ponds or streams.

If you have an aboveground storage tank, be sure to visually inspect all aboveground tanks to check for leaks, and replace the tanks if they are in poor condition.



Use the checklist found in pamphlet WHPP 910, Tank Removal Checklist, to help you in removing or properly closing an unregulated underground heating oil tank. If you need further information about underground tank removal, please contact the **KY Division of Waste Management, Louisville Regional Office:**

Duke York
 9116 Leesgate Road
 Louisville, KY 40222
 Phone: (502) 429-7120



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