



Informational Bulletin From the Office of the Fire Marshal

Decommissioning Underground Storage Tanks

Many homeowners have heating oil tanks they no longer use. Home heating oil tanks, used and unused, can cause problems for



property owners and the environment.

Heating oil tanks can last 30 or more years, depending on the

surrounding soil and thickness of the tank, before corroding and leaking.

A leaking tank can:

- Contaminate soil on the primary and neighboring properties;
- Contaminate groundwater
- Contaminate surface waters;
- Cause vapor accumulation under or in nearby buildings;
- Collapse and cause sinkholes.

Property owners are liable for contamination caused by a leaking tank. In fact, past or present ownership of contaminated property may result in liability. Because of this, most lenders require decommissioning (removing or abandoning in place) of unused heating oil tanks before finalizing a property sale.

Delaying clean up can allow contaminants to spread and increase cleanup costs. Therefore, it's in the homeowner's best interest to remove or decommission an unused home heating oil tank before it presents a problem.

Regulatory Requirements

The International Fire Code (IFC), adopted by WAC 51-44, requires decommissioning of heating oil tanks that have been out of

service for one year or more using one of the following processes:

- 1) Excavation of the tank and restoration of the site in an approved manner.
- 2) Abandonment of the tank in place by filling it completely with an approved, inert solid material.

Most environmental contractors include permits and a final written step by step summation including drawings, photos, lab tests, weigh bills etc. with their service. However, homeowners are ultimately responsible to ensure the proper permits and documentation for decommissioning a tank are obtained and completed.

When the contractor completes the job be sure to get a copy of the permit confirming the permit was finalised by the CWFMO. Having complete documentation including soil samples from the decommissioning process provides objective and legal evidence whether the site is contaminated or not.

Permits

Prior to decommissioning a tank, a site specific permit must be obtained from the Camas-Washougal Fire Marshal's Office. Permits are issued to the person or contractor performing the work.

[Permit applications](#) can be downloaded, and emailed to fmo@cityofcamas.us. Please include a brief description of the work and a sketch of worksite showing location of the tank (include measurement from the center of the tank to the front of the house curb or street edge and property lines).

[Permit fees](#) are paid when the permit is issued, and before the work begins.



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Removing or Decommissioning a Residential Heating Oil Tank

You can meet the requirements of the IFC, and avoid future liability and real estate sales difficulties by having the tank decommissioned by a Washington State licensed environmental contractor. (Lenders may have additional requirements.)

Determine who will do the work. We recommend hiring a licensed, experienced environmental contractor to do the work. Tanks can explode under certain conditions, so unless you have suitable training and experience, hiring a qualified contractor is the safest option.

Hiring a Contractor

We recommended that you check references and ensure the contractor's license is current before selecting one. If you hire a contractor, you are still liable for any environmental contamination. Therefore, it is important to research and hire a reputable contractor.

What to ask contractors:

- Are they experienced? Can they provide the names and telephone numbers of current or recent customers as references?
- Do they have environmental pollution liability coverage?
- Do they collect soil samples?
- Which laboratory do they use for the analyses?
- Where will the tank, oil, and contaminated water from rinsing out the tank be disposed? Is that disposal site insured?

• What documentation, labeling, and other paperwork are provided? You should receive documentation of disposal of the tank, a copy of the lab results, documentation that the soil samples were handled properly, a copy of any permits required, and documentation of the disposal (Weigh Receipts) and/or treatment of any wastes.

For more information regarding underground storage tanks please visit:

- [United States Environmental Protection Agency on USTs](#)
- [Pollution Liability Insurance Agency \(PLIA\)](#)
(1-800-822-3905)
- [Department of Ecology \(DOE\)](#)
(Recommends that the owner has a soil sample) 360-407-6000
(Reception)