



MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

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Land and Materials Administration • Oil Control Program

Heating Oil Release Information

If you have just experienced a release of home heating oil this fact sheet will provide information about response, cleanup, and restoration activities.

Immediate Actions

- (1) **Assess your safety:** A release may cause an immediate health and safety risk to you and your home.
- (2) **Notify authorities:** Notifying the proper government agencies is critical. Calling 911 is always a best first action. You must report the spill to the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE).

REPORT SPILLS TO 911 and MDE 1-866-633-4686

- (3) **Contain and remove the spill:** Dealing with the spill quickly is very important. A quick response can protect your drinking water resource and prevent the spread of the release.

Safety

Your safety and the protection of your home and family are your first consideration. Released oil may cause a fire and health hazard. Due to safety concerns the evacuation of your home maybe necessary. Due to special handling requirements of oil contaminated material, always consider using a professional spill response company to assist in the removal of a release.

Resources

Depending on the size of the release and the impacts resulting from the release, these government agencies and private companies may be able to assist you:

- (1) **Local Fire Department (911).** 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. The fire department is the best agency to determine if there is a fire or explosive hazard caused by the oil release.

- (2) **The Maryland Department of the Environment.** MDE can provide technical guidance on spill control and removal. MDE's Emergency Response Division may provide initial containment and 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. MDE also may be able to reimburse you for some costs of your cleanup. Additional information is available below.

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(3) **County Health and Environmental Agency.** Local government 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 contaminated material disposal issues.

(4) **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 supplier is equipped to assist you. Some suppliers have insurance available through their service contracts. Most dealers have the means to obtain absorbents, soil disposal, cleaning chemicals, manpower and equipment.

(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 actions.

(6) **Insurance Company.** The question, if you are covered for an oil release, 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: Containment and Removal of the Spill

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.

(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 oil is found, the sump pump should be turned off and the oil product 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 and carpet pad. Specialized absorbents can be purchased at auto part dealers, marina supply stores, plumbing and hardware stores, your oil supply company, and from spill contractors. Once used, absorbent material should be picked up as soon as it is saturated. Quick removal will help abate the oil odor. 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 trashcan to prevent contaminating another area of your property.

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(4) **Odors.** One of the most troubling results of a heating oil release is the odor produced by the spill. Consider hiring a professional spill response company to remove persistent oil odors. 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 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 feasible 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. When aerating in cold weather you must protect water pipes from freezing.

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/or mask oil odor. Two products commonly used by oil companies are *VaporRemed* and *Odor Gone*. These products are used on the stained area and left for several days. When used in powder form 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 severe 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 may 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. Fresh air ventilation during all cleanup activities is critical.

(5) **Environmental Impacts.** These impacts are those outside of your home. An environmental impact 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 action 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. It is best that a professional oil spill contractor, acting under an approved corrective action plan, handles this type of spill situation.

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(6) **Disposal.** All oil impacted materials, absorbent and contaminated soil must be disposed of in a legal and safe manner. Most local solid waste facilities will accept oil spill material from residences in their 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.

Maryland Department of the Environment's Involvement with Your Spill

Where there has been a release of oil that may impact water resources, in executing its mandated responsibilities, MDE may order or take any actions authorized under §§ 4-401 through 4-708 of the Environment Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland and the Code of Maryland Regulations 26.10.01 through 26.10.15 that include, but are not limited to, investigation of the source, nature, and extent of the release; source repair or removal; and soil or water removal, remediation, sampling, and evaluation. MDE enforces Maryland regulations regarding oil spills and tank management.

While MDE is conducting activities at a spill site, MDE is acting pursuant to its statutory and regulatory authority on behalf of the public at large in seeking to protect public health and safety and the natural resources of the State from oil releases and that MDE does not act for the specific benefit of any particular group, person, or property, including, but not limited to, those impacted by the oil release. MDE's work concerning a spill does not create any form of relationship of agency, partnership, or joint venture between or among MDE, the responsible parties, and impacted parties.

Neither the State of Maryland nor MDE insures or guarantees the integrity of the water from private drinking water supply wells, including any that may exist on or provide service to your property.

MDE's involvement at the oil release site and at your property does not affect and is not intended to influence your rights to investigate, evaluate and respond independently to any impacts from the oil release. In the course of fulfilling its statutory and regulatory duties, MDE is available to assist the public as it responds to oil releases. Responsible parties and impacted parties can seek the consultation of persons outside MDE regarding concerns you may have about health, property, sampling, testing, data obtained, suggested courses of action, or other issues.

MDE administers the Oil Contaminated Site Environmental Cleanup Fund which has been established by law to reimburse a homeowner for the cleanup of a release from residential aboveground or underground heating oil tanks. A maximum of \$20,000, less a \$500 deductible, may be reimbursed for eligible expenses.

To be eligible for reimbursement, the owner must:

- Submit a complete and accurate application on a form supplied by MDE;
- Certify to MDE that the discharge is not the result of a willful or deliberate act;
- Submit a corrective action plan and other pertinent information for approval by MDE;
- Be in substantial compliance with all Maryland laws and regulations applicable to residential oil storage tanks.

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If an application is approved, MDE may reimburse an applicant for the following site rehabilitation costs if they are cost effective, reasonable and consistent with MDE's requirements:

- Soil treatment, including excavation, transportation, proper disposal of oil-contaminated soils on-site treatment such as soil vapor extraction;
- Groundwater remediation equipment and installation, including soil vapor extraction equipment;
- Subsurface investigation, well bailing, recovery system design, operation or monitoring, or a combination of these activities;
- Domestic well replacement;
- Odor abatement activities, such as forced venting and petroleum saturated material removal, replacement, or restoration to a degree determined by MDE to return the dwelling to a habitable condition.

For an application or funding availability, please contact MDE at 410-537-3314.

Prevention

An oil spill at your home is a major problem. MDE recommends that homeowners take preventive measures against oil spills. MDE has several fact sheets on tank operation and maintenance available through our Oil Control Program and the website listed below. Your oil supply company can also assist you with proper tank management.

Please call the Oil Control Program at 410-537-3442 with any questions.

Visit our website at <http://mde.maryland.gov/programs/Land/OilControl/Pages/index.aspx>

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