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Cleaning Up Heating Oil Releases

Dealing with a heating oil spill quickly is very important because a quick response can protect your drinking water and prevent the spread of contamination. This fact sheet provides resources and cleanup procedures to assist you in cleanup and restoration activities. A release of heating oil may cause an immediate health and safety risk. Notifying the proper government agencies is critical. If you are unsure of what to do or if you fear for your safety, evacuate your home and call your local emergency services.

Cleanup Procedures

Safety – Your safety and the protection of your home and family are your first concern. Due to the oil release, the evacuation of your home may be necessary. Released oil may cause a fire and health hazard, so you may want to call your local emergency services. Hiring a professional spill response company to assist in the removal of a release of heating oil is strongly recommended. Many people have allergic reactions to the odor and suffer breathing problems and skin rashes, so the prompt removal of odors is very important. The area **MUST** be properly ventilated before any cleanup work takes place.

Notification – If oil is flowing from your tank or lines, immediately call your local emergency services. The local fire department can respond with material to help contain the spill. Call your oil supplier and Ohio EPA at 800-282-9378.

Containment – Check to see if closing a valve on the tank will stop or slow the flow of oil. If the flow is minimal, buckets and pans may be enough to catch the oil and prevent it from spreading. If the tank is located outside, build a dike using a shovel and direct the oil away from your house. Household materials such as rags, kitty litter, peat moss and sand can be used as dike building materials. Basement sump pumps should be checked for oil. If oil is found, turn off the pump and remove liquid oil from the sump. Also inspect the sump discharge point for oil contamination.

Absorbents – Spread out absorbents to soak up spilled oil. Household items such as rags, kitty litter, saw dust, peat moss, sand, dirt and old carpets can be used as absorbents. Specialized absorbents may be purchased at auto part dealers, marina supply stores, plumbing and hardware stores, your oil supplier or spill contractors. Absorbent materials must be picked up as soon as they are saturated. Place the material in double plastic bags and remove them from the house. Place the bags of material on a layer of plastic or in a trash can to prevent contaminating another area of your property. The absorbent material can probably be disposed with your regular trash, but you should check with your solid waste landfill first.

Odors – Consider hiring a professional spill response company to remove persistent oil odors. Perform the tasks below several times to make an area odor free. If it is impossible to remove the odor and product, all building materials that have been in contact with the oil will have to be removed. Remember that fresh air ventilation during any cleanup proce-

dures is critical for worker safety and odor elimination.

- Remove as much of the oil-saturated material, including absorbents and any other items that have come in contact with the oil, as soon as possible. If the spill occurred on soil, remove as much of the impacted soil as possible.

- To aerate the area, open as many doors and windows as possible. Use fans to pull odors out of the house, basement or crawl space. If the spill is under a house trailer, the skirting should be removed for aeration. Be prepared to aerate for a long period of time – days or even weeks.

- Wash down the affected areas. This will require several washing and rinsing operations. Odors should decrease after each application. Use products individually and mix with hot-as-possible water. Washing products such as Dawn™ Dishwashing Liquid, Simple Green™ and white vinegar have proven effective. Add a four-ounce bottle of Pure Vanilla Extract to assist in odor control. Rinse with water after using the cleaning solution. If possible, collect the rinse water in towels, a shop-vac, or somehow divert the water from the house.

- Commercially available powders and sprays that break down and mask oil odor, such as Odor Gone, can be purchased. Spread powder on the stained area and leave for several days. Remove and reapply if necessary. Make your own powder by mixing 10 parts powdered Tide™ with 1 part baking soda. Sprays such as boat bilge cleaners have proven effective on staining and odors. Use these products as directed by the manufacturer.



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Environmental Impacts – Environmental impacts are impacts outside the home, such as saturated soil or liquid product in a drain. Ohio law requires reporting environmental impacts to Ohio EPA (800-282-9378). If left unabated, these impacts can spread to neighboring properties or contaminate drinking water supplies. Quick action is critical. Liquid oil should be absorbed and removed. Saturated material should be removed. Consider hiring a professional spill contractor, since they handle these types of spills best.

Disposal – Most solid waste disposal facilities will accept solid oil spill cleanup materials like absorbent pads, rags, kitty litter, etc. They cannot accept liquid wastes such as containers of oil. Contact the disposal facility to verify acceptance of oil spill cleanup material. An oil spill contractor or heating oil supplier may be able to assist you with the disposal of saturated material.

Resources

Ohio EPA – Regulates oil spills. The agency can also provide technical guidance on spill control and cleanup.

Heating Oil Supplier – Your heating oil supplier can be an excellent resource. When contracting with your supplier, you should determine how your heating oil supplier is equipped to assist you. Some dealers have insurance available through their service contracts. Most dealers can obtain supplies necessary in cleanups, such as absorbents, soil disposal, cleaning chemicals, manpower and equipment.

Local Fire Departments – In many jurisdictions, local fire departments will respond with absorbent material and manpower to contain and control a spill that has just occurred. A quick response from the fire department can stop the spread of spill and prevent a complicated cleanup. The fire department is always the best agency to determine if a fire or explosive hazard is present due to the release.

County Health and Environmental Agency – Local agencies are often available for technical guidance and possible well-water sampling. Local government agencies can assist in making difficult decisions regarding water supply and disposal.

Private Spill Contractors – Private spill contractors have specialized equipment, tools, and manpower available for cleanup of oil releases. Ohio EPA maintains a list of contractors who specialize in spill response, and can provide the list when the spill is reported to Ohio EPA's spill hotline (800-282-9378). Companies specializing in odor removal may also be found in the yellow pages under "Fire and Water Damage Restoration."

Insurance Company – Many homeowner policies do not cover oil spills. Contact your agent to determine if your policy does cover oil spills.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) – Homeowners in federally declared disaster areas are advised to apply for federal disaster assistance by calling FEMA's teleregistration line at 800-621-FEMA (3362) for disaster-related damages. FEMA will determine eligibility for this form of assistance.