

EA / SEPA / Water UK

Guidance on the disposal of bund water and condensate

This guidance, provided by the Environment Agency, helps you safely and legally dispose of bund water and condensate from domestic oil tank installations.

Introduction

New regulations on oil storage which aim to reduce the environmental impact of spills from oil tanks mean an increasing number of domestic oil tanks are now banded. Many are sold as prefabricated tank systems, with a lid on the bund that stops rain water getting in. However, in some cases, open bunds are used. Rainwater may accumulate in open bunds and will need periodic removal. This water may be contaminated with traces of fuel oil and its safe and legal disposal has become a problem for householders and oil equipment technicians.

In addition, in some tank systems small quantities of water may condense on the inside of the tank. This accumulates below the oil at the bottom of the tank. This contaminated water can be emptied through a drain valve or using a suction tube. However, proper disposal is difficult, given the possibility of contamination and the small volumes (typically of the order of a litre per tank per year).



Scope of Document

This guidance applies to how you dispose of rainwater from within oil tank bunds and condensate emptied from oil storage tanks. It only applies to fuel storage systems at individual domestic households in England, Wales and Scotland. You should use it to decide how to dispose of water from normal tank servicing activities. It does not apply to:

- Tanks serving non-domestic premises
- Situations where there has been a significant spillage of fuel, which must be properly dealt with by a professional oil spill clean-up contractor
- Bunded storage of any material other than heating oil
- Discharge to any drain other than one you have checked is connected to the public foul drainage system

Legal background

There are legal conditions that apply to discharges to foul sewer drains. It is against the law to discharge or empty any waste water to the sewer if it contains anything which may harm the sewers, interfere with the free flow of sewer contents or have a bad affect on the treatment and disposal of sewer contents. Fuel oil, except in trace quantities, is likely to cause such adverse effects in sewers and sewage treatment.

Guidance

It is illegal to empty condensate water emptied from domestic oil storage tanks and excess rainwater that has accumulated within a domestic oil storage tank bund onto land. You may empty it down a foul sewer without the need for individual approval from the Sewerage Treatment Provider as long as you follow these conditions :

1. You have checked the property is connected to the public foul sewerage system (you can usually find this out from the water bills sent by the Sewerage Treatment Provider that show a charge for foul drainage)
2. If the property drains to the foul sewer via drains owned by a third party then their permission must be obtained before any discharge is made
3. Ensure that the drain you use to empty the condensate or water is connected to the foul sewer (not all drains will connect to the foul system so do not discharge into roofwater gullies or yard drains unless it is certain that they do connect to the foul system).
4. You do not empty more than 5 litres of condensate or rainwater on any one occasion.
5. You should not empty anything down the drain if you can see more oil on it than a rainbow-coloured film on the water surface. There must be no visible droplets or accumulations of oil. Please note that in poor lighting conditions, neat oil may look very similar to water. If you can't see a rainbow film make other checks to ensure that only water is present.



If you have any doubts about the level of contamination of the water, check with your local Sewerage Treatment Provider by calling the freephone customer helpline in your telephone directory.

NOTE: If you discharge anything other than small amounts of water containing any more than a trace quantity of oil legal action could be taken against you by the Sewerage Treatment Provider. This can include the recovery of the costs of remedying any damage caused.

