

NEWS RELEASE

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Read the special report, [FUEL for THOUGHT](#), *Recommendations to Reduce the Incidence and Severity of Accidental Releases (spills and leaks) of Home Heating Oil*

CONNECTICUT COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY RECOMMENDS STEPS TO REDUCE POLLUTION FROM HOME HEATING OIL

HARTFORD – There were an average of approximately 940 reported releases of heating oil per year at Connecticut residences from 2010 - 2018. The total amount of heating oil released over those nine years averaged at least 13,100 gallons annually. The actual total is greater because not all releases are reported.

The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) responds to many of the spills. DEEP's data indicate that the clean-up cost of those releases averages almost \$7,400 per incident. Cleanup is often performed in coordination with a contractor. DEEP makes every effort to recover its costs from the legally responsible party. In most cases, that will be the homeowner or the fuel deliverer. "Insurance can cover the expense of a clean-up, but not all policies do" said Peter Hearn, Executive Director of the Council on Environmental Quality. "Homeowners should inquire of their broker and, if needed, obtain a policy that does."

From 2010 to 2019, sixty-five percent of heating oil releases at private, non-commercial properties were caused by failure of the containment vessel, including both above ground and underground tanks (data for 2019 are incomplete). The most common cause of failure of the containment vessel is corrosion—the deterioration of the tank due to reaction with its environment. This type of release, likely, could be prevented by periodic inspections, which is a key recommendation of the report.

While any release of heating oil to the environment is bad, its impact on a drinking water supply is a grave concern to the effected residents and public health agencies. Groundwater contamination may present a health risk to some of the roughly one million residents who use groundwater as a source for drinking, bathing, or cooking.

"The Council fully supports the expansion of renewable energy but realizes that the State's transition to a zero-carbon future will not occur overnight. Given the fact that almost a third of the state's residents rely on groundwater for their potable water, it's critical that we find practical solutions to minimize the number of heating oil releases from locations in the State that use oil for heating," said Council Chairman Susan Merrow, a resident of East Haddam. "There are simple steps the 560,000 homeowners who use fuel oil in Connecticut can take to greatly reduce the risk of falling victim to an accidental release", said Hearn. The report identifies actions to reduce the risk to homeowners and to the environment from heating oil releases. The first two recommendations are borrowed from programs already in place in Connecticut's neighboring states.

1. Connecticut should mandate the same safety features required by Massachusetts and Vermont on heating oil storage systems. These may include: sleeved supply lines, vent alarm to prevent overfills, and safety valves.
2. Connecticut should require periodic inspection of heating oil tanks and supply lines by a qualified technician.
3. Connecticut needs a central database to which dealers and municipal officials can report faulty heating system equipment.
4. The State should allocate more financial resources through the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program and expand the eligible measures for other energy finance programs to help homeowners and landlords upgrade unsafe or inefficient heating systems including heating oil storage tanks.
5. DEEP should add to its [webpage](#) on home heating oil the following information:
 - Guidance to homeowners about residential insurance coverage for accidental releases of home heating oil.
 - A statement that heating oil dealers' liability insurance may cover releases that are their fault.
 - Reference to state programs that are available to assist homeowners who wish to upgrade or replace heating oil tanks or heating systems.

About the Council on Environmental Quality

The Council on Environmental Quality is required by state law to submit the state's [Annual Report](#) on the status of Connecticut's environment to the Governor and to recommend legislation for correcting deficiencies in environmental laws. The Council publishes special reports, such as this one, to analyze identified problems in greater detail. Additional responsibilities of the Council include review of Environmental Impact Evaluations of other state agencies, publication of the twice-monthly [Environmental Monitor](#), and investigation of citizens' complaints and allegations of violations of environmental laws. The Council is a nine-member board that is independent of DEEP (except for administrative functions). The chairman and four other members are appointed by the Governor, two members by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, and two by the Speaker of the House.

The report is on the CEQ's website at https://www.ct.gov/ceq/lib/ceq/Fuel_for_Thought_-_Recommendations_to_Reduce_the_Incidences_and_Severity_of_Accidental_Releases_of_Home_Heating_Oil.pdf