

# Good Practice for Agricultural Fuel Storage in Northern Ireland

The most common use of tanks on farms is to store fuel oil, used to power agricultural machinery, and oil used for servicing machinery (e.g. waste lubrication and hydraulic) which can be produced in large amounts and requires containment.

Fuel oil must be stored and used safely and responsibly, be protected from fire risk and contained so as to prevent pollution.



## Legislation

The SSAFO (Silage, Slurry and Agricultural Fuel Oil) Regulations for Northern Ireland require any new or substantially altered agricultural fuel store with a capacity of greater than 1,250 litres to be:

- Constructed and bunded to the appropriate specification; and
- Notified to NIEA (Northern Ireland Environment Agency) at least 28 days in advance of the installation being brought into use.

Bunds should be sized according to the quantity and capacity of oil storage facilities. For example, a single storage tank requires a bund capable of holding 110% of the tank capacity.

The Regulations allow the use of existing oil

tanks to continue. However, the NIEA are empowered to inspect tanks on farms. Existing installations that are considered to present a pollution problem can be served with a notice, which requires work to be undertaken or precautions implemented to reduce the risk of pollution to watercourses or groundwater.

## Design and Construction

Under the SSAFO Regulations, above ground fuel tanks and areas storing oil drums must be:

- Surrounded by an impermeable bund (if not of the integrally bunded type), likely to last 20 years and sited a minimum of 10 metres away from any watercourse.
- Arranged so that any permanently fixed valves or taps empty vertically downwards into the bund and shall be shut and locked in that position when not in use.

- Fitted with an automatically closing valve or tap at the end of any flexible pipe used for filling vehicles.
- Located so as to reduce to a minimum the risk of fire.
- Constructed to the relevant OFTEC Standard (OFS T100 for plastic tanks and OFS T200 for steel tanks).
- Adequately supported on a permanent base.
- Protected from damage by vehicles.
- Provided with a visible sight glass or contents gauge to prevent over filling.
- Fitted with a shut-off valve next to the tank if it supplies a grain dryer or other fixed equipment.
- Fitted with an anti-syphon device if the tank inlet is lower than the highest level of fuel in the tank.
- Fitted with outlet valves marked to show whether they are open or closed.

## Tank Filling and Operating Procedures

Extra care should be taken when handling fuel oil due to its flammability. It is a good idea to locate sand and other absorbent materials close to storage areas for use in the event of a spillage. Detergents must never be used to clean up oil as they increase pollution risk. When not in use, valves should be closed, locked and any flexible hoses/hose outlets should be contained and locked within the bund. Also, it is important to ensure tanks, bunds and valves are regularly checked for leaks and repaired if necessary and steel tanks are adequately painted to prevent corrosion. To avoid overfilling vehicle fuel tanks, customers should arrange to be present when the fuel is delivered and a contingency plan should be put in place in case of emergency.

## Emptying the Bund

Water, oil and debris accumulate within bunds over time. Therefore, to ensure they are able contain any accidental spillage it is important

that they are emptied regularly. A hand pump can be used to extract clean water from the sump and small amounts of oil on the surface can be removed using special oil absorbing textiles. These should then be disposed of safely. However, if contaminated water or large amounts of oil are present, a clean-up specialist must be used.

## Disposing of Waste Oils

Waste oils and oily wastes should never be deposited into soakaways, waterways, drains or sewers as this can cause serious water pollution. Also, disposing onto land poses a risk to groundwater and soil. Therefore, where waste oil cannot be reused on a farm (e.g. to fuel a heater) it should be taken to a suitable licensed waste disposal facility, usually provided by local councils.

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