

What you need to know about
CONTAMINATED SITES



Buying and owning **property**



Contamination from oil, gas, and other chemicals puts people's health at risk—and harms the environment.

It can also leave you with serious legal and financial issues. Contamination occurs when substances in the soil, groundwater, sediment, or surface water are above the criteria for Nova Scotia.

Before you buy a property

Could it be contaminated?

Protect yourself by making sure there is no contamination on a property before you buy it. If you find contamination after you buy it, you may be responsible to clean it up. You will also have to deal with any contamination that goes from your property onto another property.

Have the property assessed by a contaminated sites professional

If you suspect that the way the property was used could have resulted in contamination, a site professional can look for problems on the property before you buy it. Site professionals perform what is called a Phase 1 ESA (Environmental Site Assessment).

Having a Phase 1 ESA helps you identify potential risks and signs of contamination. A site professional will review the history of the property by

- looking at all available public records
- looking at aerial photos and available fire insurance plans and municipal directories
- interviewing people who may know how the site has been used
- checking the Nova Scotia Environment Environmental Registry (more on this below)

As part of the Phase 1 ESA the Site Professional will also inspect a site to look for various sources of contamination, including signs of leaks or spills, the presence of hazardous materials, signs of illegal dumps and buried materials, or underground storage tanks.



Check the Environmental Registry novascotia.ca/nse/dept/envregistry.asp

This registry lists all the public records on the property under the Environment Act. It will show whether there are any documents regarding contamination, certain types of petroleum storage tanks registered with the department (does not include your typical domestic oil tank), any orders, appeals, decisions, and hearings. You can apply for information using the online form at Environmental Registry – Government of Nova Scotia, go to novascotia.ca/nse/dept/docs/FOIPOP_EnvRegistryApplication.pdf

Look for the right insurance

Does your property insurance cover cleaning up contamination if you run into a problem?

Ask your insurance agent and carefully review your policy. The cost to ensure you have the appropriate coverage is fairly low. The cost to you to clean up contamination can be thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars if you are not covered.

Questions to ask your insurance agent about your coverage:

- What exactly does your insurance coverage pay for?
 - The property next door but not yours?
 - Buildings but not land?
 - Land but not buildings?
 - All the property that is affected?
- What are the payment limits?
- Are there other limits on what the policy covers? Ask for details and verify by reading your policy.

You can also ask if there are better rates for oil tanks that are protected against vandalism and that have new technologies to help them last longer. There may also be better rates for indoor oil tanks.

Now that you own a property

Small steps can keep you and the environment safe – and save you money. These steps apply to commercial and residential properties.

Prevention is the best solution

Store hazardous materials safely

Checklist

- If you have a business, make sure you have all the federal, provincial, and municipal approvals for storing hazardous materials.
- Make sure that you and any staff have all the appropriate training and credentials for handling and storing hazardous materials safely.
- Follow the instructions for the products you store on the property.
- Look online for ideas for storing hazardous materials safely.
- Hire a professional to install your equipment.
- Use secondary containment for anything that can leak, like a plastic tray under an oil tank. When you install a new tank indoors, you can buy special trays just for this purpose.
- Inspect your equipment regularly to make sure it is safe and in good condition.



Look after your oil tank

Like a car, an oil tank needs regular care. The oil tank for a house holds about 1000 litres (200 gallons) and weighs about 1000 kilograms (1 tonne) when it is full. In Nova Scotia, though the numbers are going down, oil leaks are still the most-common type of contamination.

Checklist

- Buy a new tank. You can NOT restore an oil tank. Re-using tanks is against the law.
- Have a professional install your oil tank. Installing it right reduces the chances of a leak or malfunction.
- Use only new oil. The sludge from your old tank has microorganisms, acids, and water that begin to destroy a new tank right away.
- Do NOT patch a tank. It is most likely leaking because it has rusted from the inside.
- Use a tank made of the best possible materials and that uses technology to make a tank last longer. These include fibreglass tanks, double-walled tanks, lined tanks, stainless steel tanks, and tanks with thicker walls of 2.5- mm or 12-gauge steel.
- Choose a fuel line that comes out the bottom of the tank, for unprotected steel tank systems. A bottom outlet system removes sludge at the bottom of the tank.
- Make sure the tank has a vent alarm so that it is not overfilled. The alarm will whistle when the tank gets too full.
- Use a guard, such as a post, in front of a tank in a garage to protect it from being bumped.
- Use a gauge protector over an outdoor fuel gauge.
- Take steps against vandalism, such as
 - put an oil tank indoors if possible
 - use an anti-siphon device, to stop oil from spilling if the supply line is cut or breaks
- Inspect your tank and fuel lines regularly.
- Have your fuel company inspect your oil tank once a year.
- Make sure your tank is properly supported. The tank can tip—in a high wind or flood or when the ground shifts.
- Seal any floor drains in a basement. Do not install a sump and sump pump near an oil tank or vice versa.
- Put the fuel line above the basement floor. Concrete can corrode copper lines and cause them to leak. You can also keep an eye on the condition of the line if it is above the floor.
- Put something you can walk on over the fuel line to protect it.
- Do not install your oil tank in locations where falling ice may damage the tank, gauge, or line or in areas where tall grass or leaves may cause the tank to corrode.

For more information on oil tanks please refer to the brochure entitled “Living with an Oil Tank” and the guide entitled “Installation and Environmental Management Guide for Aboveground Domestic Oil Tanks in Nova Scotia” novascotia.ca/nse/petroleum/docs/OilTankinstall.pdf

Find a spill early and **act quickly** for minimal impact

30-Day Cleanups

Ask a site professional whether this kind of cleanup can be used for your site if you have a spill. There is a minimal amount of paperwork, and Nova Scotia Environment needs a minimal amount of information about the spill and the cleanup if the 30-Day Cleanup exemption is applicable.

Example

The hose on an oil delivery truck breaks during a fill up and spills 190 litres of oil in your driveway.

The spill affects only the soil. The cleanup starts right away, supervised by a site professional, and takes less than 30 days to finish. The site professional may use the 30-Day Cleanup option.

You can use a 30-Day Cleanup for a sudden spill of any of these substances

- petroleum hydrocarbons – the oil in your oil tank or the gas in your car
- glycols – antifreeze and solvents
- other automotive fluids – brake fluid, transmission fluid, and antifreeze

The soil, sediment, and surface water are cleaned up to the standards for the property in the Contaminated Sites Regulations. There is no contamination in the groundwater.

You hire a site professional to manage the cleanup and provide the paper work to Nova Scotia Environment.

Additional information, facts sheets, brochures and the Contaminated Sites Regulations are at the Nova Scotia Environment website novascotia.ca/nse/contaminatedsites.

