



## **RESIDENTIAL OIL SPILLS AND FLOODING**

### **What Homeowners Need to Know**

If your home has been affected by a flood that caused an oil spill in or near your home, you should contact the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) Spill Hotline immediately at **1-800-457-7362** to report the spill. In some cases the oil is mixed with the water that has flooded your home. If so, **DO NOT** pump the water out into your yard. The oil may spread and contaminate other areas including nearby wells, water bodies and homes. Oil spills can contaminate indoor air. The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) is providing this information to help with this problem. If you have questions, call **518-402-7810** or the toll-free number at **1-800-458-1158**. After 5 PM and weekends, call **1-866-881-2809**.

#### **Oil and Water in Basement**

If a layer of oil is on water in a basement, you can minimize the amount of oil spread on walls and floors and the amount of other damage to your property by removing the oil before pumping the water out. For an oil film, absorbent pads may be sufficient to collect the oil. For a thicker layer of oil, a vacuum truck may be necessary to skim the oil off the water. As mentioned above, do not pump the water into your yard before removing the oil. The NYSDEC can help coordinate this work.

#### **Controlling Odors**

Keep all doors, laundry chutes, etc. between the basement and living space closed. Stairways between the basement and the first floor living space that do not have a closable door should be partitioned off with a sheet of plastic. Avoid tracking oil in the home. Do not wear any shoes in the living space that may have been contaminated with oil.

Fans can help to control odors. The **DIRECTION** of fan air flow is critical to keeping odors out of the living space. Exhaust basement areas by **BLOWING AIR OUT** of basement through a single window, with no other basement windows open. If the only opening to the outdoors is a walkout basement door, then a large fan should be placed in the doorway, blowing out. If possible, block or reduce the open space around fans (shroud) to increase the fan's effectiveness. Any windows near the basement exhaust air should be kept closed to prevent contaminated air from re-entering the home. Fans used in the living space for occupant comfort (reduce odors) should blow outdoor air inward. Use caution when operating central heating or central air conditioning systems as these could further distribute odors and possibly contaminate system components.

#### **Oil Coated Belongings, Debris and Building Materials**

Some oil-coated materials can be difficult to clean. Hard-surfaces such as glass or metal can be cleaned with detergents or other cleaners. Porous materials such as wood, boxes, fabrics, sheetrock or insulation will most likely need to be discarded. Remove contaminated items and materials to the outside of the home. Stockpile discarded materials on plastic and cover with plastic. Use cat litter or other absorbent materials available at home improvement stores to absorb any remaining oil. Check with a professional cleaning company for information on cleaning or deodorizing household furnishings.

When performing any cleanup work you should take steps to minimize exposure. For example, wear clothing that will help reduce skin exposure such as long pants, long sleeve shirts and gloves (rubber if available). Work in areas that have been ventilated as described above.



Individuals with questions regarding the disposal of flood-related petroleum contaminated debris or household hazardous waste from homes can call NYSDEC at 518-402-8678. Calls concerning non-residential wastes should be directed to NYSDEC at 518-402-8792. NYSDEC will provide information to assist in finding a nearby disposal site or to determine if there will be a waste pickup scheduled for their area.

### **Furnaces and Boilers**

Oil-fired furnaces or boilers should not be started until they have been checked by a service technician. Combustion processes using fossil fuel generate exhaust gases including carbon monoxide which can be deadly and must be vented. If a furnace or boiler is damaged, gases may be released in your home. Be sure all tank vents are clear. Be sure all flue vents are clear so gases exhaust freely. When basement exhaust fans are operating, the potential for back drafting should be evaluated.

### **Drinking Water Wells**

Drinking water from wells contaminated by petroleum will often have an odor. If you think this is the case, do not drink the water and notify the NYSDEC and/or NYSDOH.

### **Potential Health Effects**

Most of the information on the health effects of petroleum products in humans is based on inhalation exposure to petroleum product vapors. Exposure to high levels of petroleum products can cause health effects, primarily on the nervous and respiratory systems. People who inhaled elevated air levels of fuel oil vapors for short periods of time had nausea, increased blood pressure, eye irritation, headaches, light-headedness, and poor coordination. Longer term exposure to elevated levels of fuel oil vapors can cause similar effects on the nervous and respiratory systems and may also affect the blood, liver and kidneys. Petroleum products in contact with the skin may cause irritation and blistering in some people. The elderly, the very young, and people with respiratory diseases may be especially sensitive to the effects of inhaling petroleum vapors. Long-term exposure to petroleum product vapors should be minimized to the extent practical. If petroleum odors are present, measures to reduce long-term exposures should be considered. If you are experiencing health effects, you should contact your physician or seek medical help.

### **Temporary Relocation**

If strong odors are present in the living space of the home, you may want to limit time spent in the home or consider temporary relocation until indoor air quality improves. Strength of the odors, health status and age of occupants (e.g., people with respiratory or cardiovascular disease, pregnant women, young children and the elderly may be at greater risk) are factors to consider when deciding whether to relocate. Options for temporary relocation for you and your family are relatives, friends or a nearby shelter. If these options are not available, you should contact the NYSDOH for help in relocating. Although New York law stipulates that oil tank owners and operators may be legally responsible for costs associated with oil spill cleanups, including relocation costs, State officials are exploring all other avenues to pay for such costs, including FEMA, the federal Oil Pollution Act of 1990, and insurance. Your health and safety and that of your family are the foremost priority.