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uel Storage

Many facility managers may find themselves responsible for the safe storage of fuel on business premises. The risk of fire or pollution incidents must be properly managed and compliance with appropriate regulation maintained. Oil storage is particularly problematic and is an issue that must be carefully handled.

Oil is the most commonly reported type of water pollution and causes over 16% of all pollution incidents each year. Oil is toxic to plants and animals, can damage rivers and groundwaters, and destroy natural habitats and drinking water supplies. Spills caused by inadequate storage facilities or poor operating practices are common, and very expensive to remediate.

In order to address this problem minimum design standards for fuel tanks were introduced in the Control of Pollution (Oil Storage) Regulations 2001, which are mandatory for all fuel storage facilities. In England these Regulations are administered by the Environment Agency. The Regulations apply to all external, above-ground containers of more than 200 litres capacity used for the storage of fuel oil and petrol.

Failure to comply with the Regulations is a criminal offence and may lead to prosecution. Similar legislation exists in Scotland (the Water Environment (Oil Storage) (Scotland) Regulations 2006) but not in Northern Ireland and Wales. Statistics from the Environment Agency's National Incident Recording System (NIRS) indicate that the Regulations are bringing progress, with a 41% reduction in oil and fuel incidents since 2001.

Underground tanks are not subject to the Regulation but they are a high risk to the environment as they are difficult to inspect and leaks may not be immediately obvious. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has published a Code of Practice for the good design, operation and management of such tanks. In the event of a release, if a company were following the guidance it would be considered as a mitigating factor during any subsequent litigation.

The Environment Agency produces a number of Pollution Prevention Guidance Notes (PPGs) with advice on the law and good environmental practice, to help reduce environmental risks from business activities www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/topics/pollution