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## Oil storage tank leak a cautionary tale

A scary tale of an oil leak in an Ottawa-area home provides a valuable lesson for homeowners whose homes are heated by oil.

In early 2006, an exterior oil storage tank next to the residence released approximately 900 litres of fuel oil onto the ground.

The owner's insurance company called in Ottawa-based Canadian Disaster Restoration Group to respond to the environmental contamination.

Not only was the site of the house contaminated, but the leak posed significant immediate risk of contamination to neighbouring properties. The potential liability was a matter of great concern to the owner's insurer.

The lot size was 450 square metres and there were nearby neighbours in all directions. The property was near the top of a downward-sloping street of residential properties. The Ottawa River lies at the bottom of the hill.

A shallow aquifer beneath the property was comprised primarily of sand and so the potential for rapid flow of contamination in the flowing water was very high. The leak occurred in cold weather and the downhill flow of oil through the site was sure to accelerate as the spring temperatures began to rise over the weeks after the leak.

A speedy reaction to the leak was essential. Concentric Associates, a part of the disaster restoration team, analyzed the situation and decided that the owner's young family had to leave the property immediately for their own safety and to allow faster remediation of the damage.

From a practical viewpoint, everyone involved agreed that demolition of the house was the best option and the insurer purchased the house from the owner. This allowed the family to relocate to a new home without delay.

In March 2006, a demolition permit was obtained and the house was demolished. Eastern Building Restoration began remedial excavation the same day.

On the surface, the oil had spread out to cover an estimated 50 square metres or about 538 square feet. Undemeath this area, a plume of fuel oil had leaked into the aquifer which was undemeath and around the residence and all of it had to be removed.

Over the next two weeks, almost 2,000 metric tonnes (4.4 million pounds) of contaminated soil were removed.

By mid-April 2006, the site had been fully backfilled and a post-remedial groundwater sampling program was undertaken during the following months.

Eventually, the site was approved by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment and it was resold for construction of a new home.

Total cost for the remediation came to about \$500,000 plus the cost of buying the house.

Fortunately, the disaster recovery team kicked into high gear fast enough so that the neighbouring houses were not affected by the flow of oil underground.

The insurer's decision to purchase the property relieved the homeowners of a tremendous burden while allowing the restoration crew to get at the contamination quickly.

This protected the surrounding neighbourhood from contamination and the insurer from liability to the neighbours.

Had the house not been demolished, or if the cleanup hadn't occurred so quickly, the costs could have been exponentially higher.

The scary part of the whole tale is that the cause of the oil spill was due to a corroded oil tank. The hole in the tank was about the size of the tip of a ballpoint pen.

Jean-Francois Raymond is the marketing director of the Canadian Disaster Recovery Group. For homeowners with oil tanks interior or exterior he recommends checking oil tanks and lines yearly, or even more frequently, especially if they are old.

Strict requirements govern the use of residential oil tanks. Information is available from the Technical Standards and Safety Authority, [www.tssa.org](http://www.tssa.org), or phone 1-877-682-8772 or 416-734-3300.

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