

Basis of Design

The purpose of this section is to provide the guidelines for the development of specifications for Underground Storage Tanks (USTs).

Overview

Underground storage tanks (USTs) are subject to local, state and federal rules and have the potential to leak with time. Follow the guidance provided below to comply with applicable regulations and avoid the need for future environmental cleanup. All known UW-owned USTs are included in the [list of contaminated sites](#).

UST installation and maintenance

New USTs must meet the performance and operating standards in the Washington State underground storage tank regulations (WAC 173-360). Double-walled tanks and piping equipped with interstitial monitoring systems and overfill alarm should be installed. Monthly records must be maintained to show that the system alarms and spill prevention measures are functional. Maintenance records must be maintained and available to inspectors.

New USTs must also be registered with the Department of Ecology, with the exception of heating oil tanks. Ecology issues licenses and tank tags to registered tank owners and requests that they be prominently displayed for inspectors and material delivery personnel. Registered UST owners pay an annual licensing fee to Ecology. Ecology requests proof of insurance; the UW is self-insured and a certificate of insurance is available from the UW Risk Management Office and must be available to tank inspectors.

UST Closure

USTs no longer in service must be emptied, triple rinsed and then either removed from the ground or filled with an inert solid material. If the tank is not removed, associated piping must also be removed and plugged to prevent accidental filling of closed tanks. Any residual product from a closed UST must be managed by a UW approved recycler or by EH&S as Hazardous Waste.

A certified tank assessor must perform tank removals. An environmental contractor may also be necessary if leaks are suspected or known. A certified tank assessor and/or environmental consultant prepares tank closure paperwork, including a 30-day notification form, tank closure forms, fire department permits, and the local health department forms and permits. Certain permit exemptions exist for heating oil tank closures, but are dependent on the size of the heating oil tank. Permits must be posted at the job site. In Pierce County the local health department manages tank removals; in King County, Ecology manages them. Finally, if a UST has known or suspected hazardous material contamination, all workers on the job site during the removal must have 40-hour HAZWOPER training.

Closing a UST can lead to the discovery of site contamination due to leaks or overfills. Project budgets need to contain contingencies to fund these consultants and the environmental assessments and site cleanups.

Leaking and Abandoned USTs

If you become aware of a leaking or abandoned UST, immediately call the EH&S Environmental Programs Office (EPO) at 206.616.0585. Abandoned USTs may still contain petroleum and could be leaking. EPO must report confirmed releases to regulators within 24 hours of discovery. Field assessments are then required to determine the extent of the contamination and the appropriate cleanup action. EPO oversees regulatory compliance with the environmental cleanup.