



A Citizen's Guide to UNDERGROUND STORAGE TANKS (USTs)

What is an underground storage tank?

An underground storage tank (UST) is a large container with underground piping that is below the earth's surface. USTs are used to store gasoline, diesel fuel, biodiesel, and other hazardous substances.



USTs are most often found at gas stations. Underground storage tanks are regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, state, or tribal agencies.

Who regulates USTs?

Owners and operators of USTs must comply with federal UST regulations. U.S. EPA works with tribal environmental departments to make certain that tanks are properly maintained. Tribal UST Inspectors visit local UST facilities to conduct visual inspections and determine if owners/operators are following regulations.



Tribal UST Inspector

Why are UST facilities inspected?

Tribal UST Inspectors routinely visit UST facilities on tribal lands to ensure owners/operators are complying with regulations. If a UST facility is not properly operated or maintained, there is a potential for release of harmful pollutants into the environment.

For example, gasoline contains harmful substances that can contaminate soil and groundwater. Contaminated sites can take years to clean up and are very costly, especially if the gasoline penetrates into the groundwater.



What are the health hazards of contaminated groundwater?

Small amounts of gasoline can contaminate a large volume of water. At low levels, fuel contamination may not be detected. At high levels, fuel can be detected by smell and taste. Gasoline and other petroleum fuels contain various potentially toxic compounds, such as benzene, toluene, xylene, and methyl tertiary-butyl ether (MTBE). Benzene is considered a human carcinogen.

What are the responsibilities of UST owners/operators?

Several of the responsibilities of UST owners/operators include:

- Properly installing equipment;
- Maintaining equipment and making sure equipment is operating correctly;
- Showing financial responsibility for equipment or potential cleanup (should a release occur); and
- Properly removing tanks when they will no longer be in use.

UST owners/operators must perform monthly and yearly tests to make sure that equipment is functioning properly. Facilities that are well maintained prevent the release of petroleum substances into the environment.

Who do you call when you suspect a petroleum leak?

Please notify your tribal or federal regulatory agency.



For more information:

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