



Advice and Recommendations to Avoid Heating Oil Theft

Heating oil theft is a problem for a lot of people around the country. In actual fact, this is one crime which seems to be getting worse as the years go by and there is often an increase in this type of crime whenever the price of crude oil rises. Around 1.5 million* households are on heating oil in the UK and the average cost of a full tank of oil is around £600 - £1200 (depending on the size of the tank). Oil thefts are particularly prevalent in isolated rural areas or farms, but there are a number of measures that you may like to take to make it less likely that you will become a victim:

- 1. VISIBILITY:** Try to make sure that your oil tank is not visible from the road. If it is, consider using fences, hedges or a trellis to make it less visible to passing traffic. If your drive has gates keep them closed when away from the property. If your tank is located in the back garden consider using anti-climb paint (never dries) on fences.
- 2. LOCK:** The advantage of having a good quality lock fitted to your tank needs to be carefully considered. It can and does deter some criminals. Close shackle padlocks are the best as they offer most resistance to the bolt cropper as, due to their design, they have very little metal hoop exposed. However there are some criminals that will not be put off by this and will just cut the connecting pipe or drill a hole in the tank, which could result in you having to clear up an oil spill as well as having your oil stolen.
- 3. ALARM:** Having an alarm fitted to the tank is another way to deter criminals. Remote electronic oil level gauges are available which will set off an audible alarm in the home if the oil level in the tank suddenly drops.
- 4. LIGHT:** Possibly one of the best ways to prevent your heating oil from being stolen is to install intruder flood lights as they make any property much harder for a thief to target. If they are also fitted with motion detector sensors the lights will come on as soon as an intruder approaches. If you do not fancy or it is not practical to install floodlighting, you could consider low energy 'dusk till dawn' lights. If these are positioned close to the tank they should, in most cases, provide sufficient light to illuminate any suspicious activity.
- 5. DEFENSIVE PLANTING:** Nature's way of reducing crime. Thieves will not wish to force their way through or over a prickly hedge as the smallest trace of blood or ripped clothing could help the police identify the offender. Prickly shrubs can, if planted around your tank, provide an effective and decorative thief proof barrier.
- 6. BE ALERT:** If you can, be present when the tank is being filled to see if there are other vehicles acting suspiciously in the area. If so, make a note of the registration number and call the police. (Thames Valley Police Phone Number: 0845 505505)

* According to the Oil Firing Technical Association www.oftec.org