

Decommissioning an underground petroleum storage tank or system

Any petroleum product or vapour that remains within a storage tank or system could cause significant risk to people, property and the environment.

When should you decommission an underground storage tank or system?

An underground storage tank should be decommissioned if it has not been used to store petroleum product for two years or is not intended to be used again to store petroleum product. A storage tank may have operated individually or as part of an underground petroleum storage system ('storage system') which includes any pipes, valves and other equipment.

What does decommissioning mean?

Decommissioning a storage tank or system means having its contents removed and making it safe by removing it from the ground or rendering it permanently unusable.

Decommissioning must be done in accordance with Australian Standard AS 4976–2008.

In limited circumstances, storage tanks may be decommissioned 'in-situ' (left underground) by filling it with an inert solid material such as foam.

However, this option is only to be considered when there is an unacceptable risk of damaging surrounding property and/or infrastructure due to their removal.

Decommissioning an underground storage tank or system must be done by a duly qualified person who holds a demolition licence from SafeWork NSW, is competent and experienced in the task.



A tank is removed from the ground and transported for appropriate disposal as part of the decommissioning process.

Why should you decommission an underground storage tank or system?

- Any remaining product or vapour in a storage tank or system could leak and pollute or contaminate surrounding land and groundwater, creating risks to people, property and the environment. If this happens, the EPA or local council may take regulatory action, requiring you to clean up the pollution or contamination. Hefty fines may also be issued for polluting land or water.
- If a tank or system hasn't been decommissioned, the person responsible is

required to comply with the UPSS Regulation, such as installing and maintaining leak detection and loss monitoring for the storage tank or system. Penalties apply for failure to comply with requirements of the UPSS Regulation.

- Proper decommissioning demonstrates that environmental risks and liabilities posed from the storage tank or system have been addressed. This will increase the potential future land-use options and likely value for the property.

Who is responsible for an underground storage tank or system?

If the storage system is still in use or has not yet been decommissioned, the person who has management and control of the storage system is responsible. The definition of 'use' includes allowing petroleum to remain in the system.

If the storage system is no longer in use, the person who managed and controlled the tank or system immediately before it ceased to be used is responsible. If that person cannot be located, the owner of the land where the tank or system is located becomes responsible.

What do NSW Work Health and Safety laws require?

SafeWork NSW is responsible for regulating worker safety relating to 'abandoned' underground tanks or systems at a workplace.

A tank is deemed to be abandoned if it has not been used to store petroleum for two or more years or is not intended to be used again to store petroleum.

Work health and safety laws require abandoned tanks at a workplace – that previously contained flammable or combustible liquids (including petrol and/or diesel) – to be removed, or, if it is not reasonably practicable to do so, have it 'made safe'.

SafeWork NSW must be notified when an underground storage tank at a workplace has been abandoned. For more information, go to the SafeWork NSW publication, [Notification for Schedule 11 – Hazardous Chemicals and Abandoned Tanks](#).

What should you do if you plan to decommission an underground storage tank or system?

1. Notify SafeWork NSW if the system or tank is in a workplace and has been abandoned.
2. Seek advice from a duly qualified person on how to appropriately decommission the tank or system.
3. Notify the relevant local authority (usually a council) at least 30 days before the scheduled decommissioning work to identify if any planning requirements or approvals are needed. For urgent or unforeseen situations, the notification must be made as soon as possible.
4. During the decommissioning work, ensure that the site is assessed for any contamination. If land contamination is identified, consider the 'duty to notify' provisions of the Contaminated Land Management Act 1997. For more information go to [Duty to report contamination](#).
5. Provide a report to the relevant local authority (typically local council) no later than 60 days after the tank or system is decommissioned, or any necessary remediation work is completed. The report must be prepared by a duly qualified person who is competent and experienced in: describing the processes used to decommission the system, assessing the extent of land contamination, and describing any remediation work carried out.



Decommissioning a storage tank in-situ by filling it with inert foam.

Further information

- [Guidelines for Implementing the Protection of the Environment Operations \(Underground Petroleum Storage Systems\) Regulation 2019](#)
- Australian Standard AS 4976-2008 Removal and disposal of underground petroleum storage tanks
- [Notification for Schedule 11 Hazardous Chemicals and Abandoned Tanks – Guidance Material](#), SafeWork NSW.

Photos

Site inspection, western Sydney, by Hazardous Incidents and Environmental Health Branch. Photo: EPA.

Decommissioning a storage tank. Photo: courtesy of Australian Enviro Services Pty Ltd.

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