

Limitations of Spill Buckets

It is no secret that contamination around fill ports is common at many tank systems, but heavy contamination can be avoided. Many petroleum releases occur when fuel is delivered to a tank, and these releases can be minimized, or avoided. Proper maintenance of your spill buckets can be a major tool in preventing UST contamination.

Spill buckets are required on all fill ports, but do they do any good? Research on several manufacturers has revealed that synthetic spill buckets are not designed to store product for any amount of time. In fact, many manufacturers specifically exclude “storage of product” in their warranties. Although spill buckets are designed to “capture” spilled petroleum before there is a release to the environment, the buckets must be emptied immediately. Most warranties require proper installation and maintenance, which includes prompt removal of all liquid and debris from the spill buckets.

If you are one of the few owners of metal spill buckets in Iowa, you may not face the battle of compatibility with petroleum. However, you do face the problem of stagnant liquid and debris accelerating corrosion (rusting) in the spill bucket. Metal spill buckets should still be emptied immediately and inspected periodically.

As part of our inspection process, we find that over 34% of all sites are not in compliance with spill containment requirements. If a spill bucket is completely full of water or fuel, there is no room for additional spilled fuel to be contained. Spill buckets **MUST** be kept clean and empty. Now that we know that many releases occur when fuel is delivered, we need to take the necessary steps to minimize these releases. Proper maintenance of spill buckets is another tool for preventing UST leaks!

The minimum allowable spill containment size is 5 gallons for each tank fill pipe. If your spill bucket is holding liquid or is compromised so that it will not hold a minimum of 5 (additional) gallons, it is not satisfying the spill containment requirements mandated by federal regulations. Frequent inspections of your spill bucket and routine maintenance are required to operate in compliance with federal requirements. **Spill buckets should be inspected and emptied before and after every fuel delivery!**

When inspecting a spill bucket, it is important to have it completely cleaned out. Most of the damage occurs at the bottom of the bucket. Damage includes cracks, holes, and missing or loose seals. When the ground shifts around the tank, there can be stress applied directly to the spill bucket, and in many cases the bucket is damaged. In some cases, the spill bucket itself may not be damaged, but it no longer seals tight against the fill pipe. Damage may also occur on the sidewalls of the spill bucket.

Winter is extremely hard on spill buckets, especially the grade-level designs. They are constantly getting hit by shovels and snow plows. Not only does this damage lids, it can destroy the entire spill bucket. These areas need to be protected, and cleared with caution. It is never a good idea to “chip” ice out of the bucket, but you may have to so fuel can be delivered to the tank. One more reason to keep your spill buckets clean!

If you have a spill bucket that is always dry, but the other buckets in the area contain liquid every now-and-then, it is possible that it has a leak. That spill bucket should be thoroughly inspected. If a spill bucket never has fluid in it, it is because all of the fluid is leaking out!

Spill containments are only effective if they are maintained properly. When the spill bucket is full, it can't continue to do its job. Spill buckets can be very effective in preventing environmental contamination, however, it is your job to maintain them properly.

Inspect your spill buckets every day!