

# switch on

a guide for energy users



The Consumer Council



## Home Heating Oil

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Energy costs are one of the biggest household expenses. We have prepared this guide to help consumers get the best from their home heating oil and save money.

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## 1. Purchasing Oil

### What you need to know when buying oil

- By shopping around and contacting different suppliers you could make savings. Heating oil prices are normally quoted price per litre for 300L, 500L and 900L. The price of oil changes throughout the year, so the price you can expect to pay in the summer may be cheaper than the cost in the winter.

For example the difference between both the amount purchased and the time of year can be seen in the two tables below:

- It's worth checking with other suppliers, don't settle for the first quote you receive!
- Prices quoted over the phone and on company websites must be accurate and reflect the price paid at the point of delivery. A quote over the phone or online, is a contract unless otherwise stated and is therefore legally binding.
- Buy in larger quantities – if you can afford it, buy oil in bulk as it works out cheaper per litre and your supplier may also be in a better position to offer a discount.

*Top  
Tip!*



Shop around to get the best price.

- Avoid using emergency oil drums – a 20 litre emergency drum could cost 65 per cent more per litre than the cost of the average oil refill.
- Many distributors offer payment plans (See *Section 2: Payment Methods*).
- Oil Buying Clubs - Communities and local groups can club together and allow suppliers to bid or make an offer on the cheapest price. This can allow individual customers to buy smaller amounts at a cheaper price. To find out more about oil buying clubs or to see if there is one operating in your area, contact Bryson Energy (See *Section 10: Useful Contacts*).

For the latest prices visit our online oil survey:  
[www.consumercouncil.org.uk/energy](http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/energy)

Price is important but consider reliability of service, punctuality of delivery and payment terms and options. You should also ask the distributor if they have a Customer Charter in place before ordering.



## 2. Payment Methods

### What you need to know about the different ways of paying for oil

- **PayPoint** - The Northern Ireland Oil Federation in partnership with PayPoint has introduced a pre-payment scheme. This allows you to make regular payments throughout the year at your local PayPoint store instead of a single payment at the time of delivery. Check with your supplier to see if they are in the scheme and if they are they will issue you with a PayPoint card that you can use to make payment throughout year. Before you order oil from your distributor, contact them to see how much credit is in your account. However this option may limit your ability to shop around.

*Top  
Tip!*



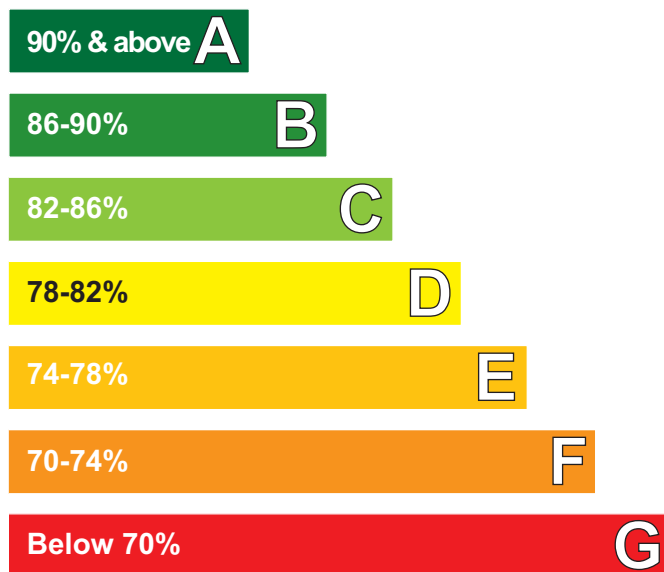
**Think in advance about the payment method that will work best for you.**

- **Oil Stamp Saving Schemes** - Many Councils run oil stamp saving schemes. Oil savings cards can be bought at your convenience to spread the cost of oil. They can be obtained from participating retailers who will sell £5 oil savings stamps that you stick to the card and which can hold up to 30 stamps. Your Council will provide you with a list of places where stamps are accepted as payment. If they are lost you won't get your money back and you cannot exchange the stamps for anything other than oil. Remember these stamps need to be treated like money.
- **Debit/Credit Card** - Most distributors will accept credit or debit cards. There may be an additional cost of between 1.5 to 2.5 per cent for using a credit card. Check with your distributor before ordering.
- **Online** - Many suppliers now have an online service where you can order and pay online using a debit or credit card.
- **Cash or cheque**

### 3. Energy Efficiency

#### What you need to know about energy efficiency

- **Replace your boiler** - Replacing a boiler which is six or more years old with a modern condensing model can save potentially up to £250\* a year.
- **Energy ratings** - All boilers in the UK are required to have an energy efficiency score. It takes into account variables such as climate, energy efficiency of properties, occupancy, and boiler or heating controls. The score is given as both a percentage and an 'A to G' rating.



\* Sutherland Tables July 2014

- **Building regulations** - All newly installed boilers are required to be at least 88 per cent efficient. For example if you spend £100 on oil then £88 will go directly on heating your home. Boilers scoring below 88 per cent are still being sold but these will eventually disappear as new models come onto the market.
- **Upgrade your system controls** - Accurate temperature controls save money by reducing heat wastage? By reducing room temperature by 1°C, you could save up to 10 per cent off your annual fuel bill. It also means that you can concentrate the heat in the rooms you use most and keep the others cooler.
- **Energy Efficiency Tips** - The Energy Saving Trust advises that by being more energy efficient an average UK property could save £325 a year:
  - Consumers with a non-condensing boiler spend on average an estimated 18 per cent more a year than those with the more efficient condensing system;
  - Turning down your thermostat by 1°C can save around 10% a year;
  - Insulating your hot water tank can save around £40 a year; and
  - Turning appliances off at the wall socket when not in use and avoiding standby saves around £35 a year.

For more information on energy efficiency or if you would like to find out about grants available in Northern Ireland contact Bryson Energy or the Energy Saving Trust. (See *Section 10: Useful Contacts*).

## 4. Deliveries

### What you need to know about oil deliveries

- ✓ Regularly check how much oil you have left to avoid suddenly running out, especially in cold weather.
- ✓ Before you order, check as accurately as possible, how much fuel you will need.
- ✓ Try to be there during the delivery.
- ✓ Ensure there is access to your tank by keeping it clear of obstructions and any pets are secured.
- ✓ After the delivery, check that the contents gauge registers the new quantity of oil.
- ✓ If you have a sight gauge, make sure it hasn't been dislodged and its valve is in the closed position.
- ✓ Check for any changes in appearance of the tank and its supporting structure.
- ✓ Also check for any fresh oil spills or leaks and report a suspected delivery spillage to the fuel supplier as soon as possible.

**Top  
Tip!**



Find out how much you need before ordering.

## 5. Boiler Servicing

### What you need to know about servicing your boiler

- **Regular Servicing** - Regular servicing can save money in the long run as well as ensuring that you can claim on any warranty that you have on the boiler. It can also prevent boiler breakdown and make sure it is running safely.
- **Signs your boiler needs serviced** - An oil boiler should produce very few emissions. Signs that it may need servicing include:
  - Black smoke or a build-up of soot;
  - A yellow or brown staining around or on your boiler;
  - Increased condensation inside windows.
- **What to expect from a boiler service** - As part of a full service, a technician should perform a number of checks and not just cleaning the flue.
- The Northern Ireland Oil Federation and the Consumer Council recommend using an OFTEC (Oil Firing Technical Association) registered technician for the servicing (and also installation) of boilers. Contact OFTEC or visit their website to get more detailed information on what you should get as part of your boiler service. (See: Section 10: Useful Contacts).

**Top  
Tip!**



Ensure your boiler is serviced annually by a qualified, registered technician.

## Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide is a highly toxic poisonous gas, which can kill quickly and with no warning. You can't see it, taste it or smell it and therefore it is difficult to detect.

Poor or inadequate servicing and installation can cause the generation of carbon monoxide. Therefore it is vital to ensure that your oil boiler is checked and serviced at least once a year.

Some symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are as follows:

- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Breathlessness
- Collapse
- Loss of consciousness



**Top  
Tip!**



As a safeguard, buy a carbon monoxide detector. These are usually inexpensive and easy to install.

## 6.Your Oil Tank

### What you need to know about your oil tank

- Unfortunately, leaks of heating oil from domestic tanks do happen and can cause pollution. Oil leaks and the clean-up operation can be expensive and your insurance may not cover the costs.
- One of the best ways to protect your tank and pipe work is with a container around your tank such as a bund. A bund will prevent pollution and save you from the disruption of a clean up after a leak. If buying a new tank choose one that is bunded inside (a tank within a tank). The Oil Firing Technical Association (OFTEC) can advise you on special requirements for bunds.
- If you are getting a new tank, you must site your tank at least 10 metres from a pond, river, ditch or lake and at least 50 metres from a borehole or spring where possible. OFTEC can advise you of the best place to site or re-site your tank to minimise your pollution risk.
- Regularly check your tank for signs of leakage or damage and know where the shut off valves are located.
- Get to know how much oil you usually use. Even a minor leak can add up to a large loss of fuel over time.
- Running out of oil can also cause an airlock that will affect your heating system and may be costly to fix.
- If you need to change your current tank, it is important that you get one that is manufactured to OFTEC standards.
- Make sure your annual service includes a tank check.
- Review your homeowners' insurance policy, or contact your insurance company to make sure your policy covers domestic fuel spills.

### What to do if you have an oil leak:

- ✓ Try and find out where the leak is coming from and stop more oil leaking.
- ✓ Switch off your oil supply at the tank, and where necessary, arrange to have it emptied.
- ✓ Never use detergents or a hose to wash the spill away.
- ✓ Prevent the spill from entering drains by blocking its flow by using earth, sand or commercial products that absorb oil.
- ✓ Keep your home ventilated by opening windows and doors.
- ✓ Contact your household insurance company or landlord.
- ✓ If there is a smell of oil in your home, call your local environmental health officer who can be reached by contacting your local Council. However they cannot clean up the oil that has leaked and you may need to employ a specialist company to do this.
- ✓ If a leak is likely to affect a stream or pond, contact the Water Pollution Hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

**Top  
Tip!**



**If you notice a sudden increase in the amount of oil you are using, check for leaks.**

### Heating oil theft and looking after your tank

By taking a few simple precautions, you can help protect your oil and boiler from thieves:

- ✓ Lock your tank and boiler housing. If possible fit hardened flexible casings to any vulnerable fuel hoses so that they are harder to cut.
- ✓ Keep your garden or drive gates closed and securely locked; but remember your distributor will require access and may levy a charge if they have to return because of no access or if tank is locked and there is no one at home.
- ✓ If your tank is visible from outside your property, consider disguising it by using fencing, trellis or plants; but remember that a minimum separation distance should be maintained to prevent fire spread.
- ✓ Consider installing security lighting and CCTV Lights which can warn you and alert neighbours of an intruder.
- ✓ If you have cause to re-site your tank or are installing a fuel tank for the first time, ensure that it is placed in a secure location - visible from your home and surrounding properties but not from the road.





## 7. Customer Charter

Along with the Northern Ireland Oil Federation (NIOF), the Consumer Council has developed their Customer Charter. The charter provides guaranteed service standards for consumers who purchase oil from an NIOF member and an agreed complaints service with the Consumer Council, which includes the following areas:

- Customer care and complaint procedures;
- Payment options;
- Using energy efficiently; and
- Special advice for vulnerable consumers.

For further details and a copy of the Customer Charter visit **[www.nioil.com](http://www.nioil.com)**

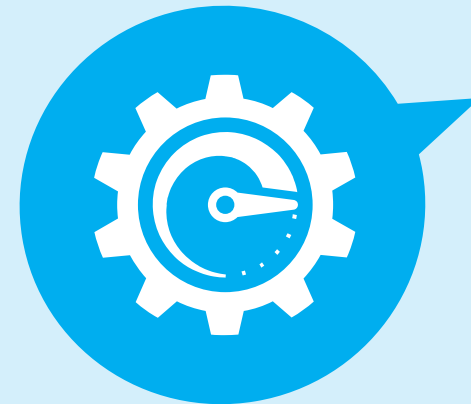


## 8. Quality and Measures

The quality and delivery practice of oil distributors in Northern Ireland is regulated by a number of pieces of legislation by Trading Standards Service.

- Both the quality of the fuel distributors sell, and the measuring equipment they use must conform to these strict standards.
- Before a distributor can make any deliveries, metering equipment must have a National Measurement Office (NMO) certificate stamped and sealed by Trading Standards Service.
- Additionally, a stamped ticket is produced on completion of each delivery made via a meter. For distributors using electronic meters, ticket will also show the time of delivery. These records can also be inspected by Trading Standards Service.

If you have a complaint about the quality and measures of oil, contact Consumerline. (*See Section 10: Useful Contacts*).





## 9. Making a complaint

For complaints relating to customer services follow the stages below:



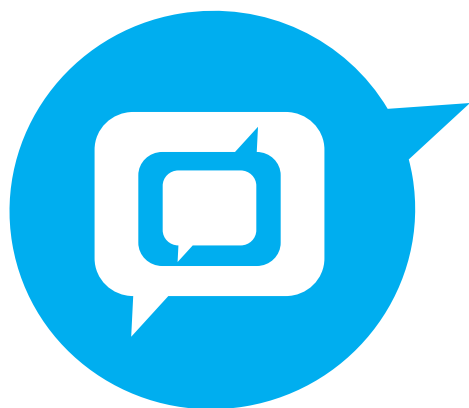
**Step 1** - Contact your oil distributor and give them an opportunity to resolve the problem. If they cannot sort out the problem to your complete satisfaction, you can ask to talk to a supervisor or manager.



**Step 2** - If you remain dissatisfied with the response from your supplier you can contact the NIOF to see if they are a member. If so they will review your complaint. (See *Section 10: Useful Contacts*)



**Step 3** - If you are unable to resolve your complaint, or if at any time you are unhappy with the response, you can contact the Consumer Council. (See: *Section 10: Useful Contacts*)



## 10. Useful contacts

### The Consumer Council

The Consumer Council  
116 Hollywood Road  
Belfast  
BT4 1NY

**Tel:** 0800 121 6022 or 028 9064 2488  
**Email:** [complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk](mailto:complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk)  
**Web:** [www.consumercouncil.org.uk](http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk)

### Energy Efficiency Advice

#### **Bryson Energy Advice Line**

**Tel:** 0800 1422 865  
**Web:** [www.brysonenergy.org.uk](http://www.brysonenergy.org.uk)  
**Email:** [advice@brysonenergy.org](mailto:advice@brysonenergy.org)

#### **Energy Saving Trust (EST)**

**Tel:** 0300 123 1234  
**Web:** [www.energysavingtrust.org.uk](http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk)

### Debt and Financial Advice

#### **Debt Action NI**

Debt Action NI  
Advice NI  
1 Rushfield Avenue,  
Belfast BT7 3FP

**Tel:** 0800 917 4607  
**Web:** [www.debtaction-ni.net](http://www.debtaction-ni.net)



The Consumer Council

### StepChange

**Tel:** 0800 138 1111

**Web:** [www.stepchange.org](http://www.stepchange.org)

### Citizens Advice

46 Donegall Pass  
Belfast  
BT7 1BS

**Tel:** 028 9023 1120

**Email:** [info@citizensadvice.co.uk](mailto:info@citizensadvice.co.uk)

**Web:** [www.citizensadvice](http://www.citizensadvice)

### Northern Ireland Oil Federation (NIOF)

11 Ballyblack Road East  
Newtownards  
BT22 2BD

**Email:** [david@nioil.com](mailto:david@nioil.com)

**Web:** [www.nioil.com](http://www.nioil.com)

### Oil Save

Oil-save is a new service for oil heating customers, delivered in partnership by OFTEC and The Heating Oil Industry. (The organisations that support and uphold standards in the oil heating industry and provide help and information to consumer on getting the best from their oil service).

**Tel:** 0800 65 85 080

**Web:** [www.oilsave.org.uk](http://www.oilsave.org.uk)

### Consumerline / Trading Standards

176 Newtownbreda Road  
Newtownbreda  
Belfast  
County Antrim  
BT1 3BU

**Tel:** 0300 123 6262

**Email:** [consumerline@detini.gov.uk](mailto:consumerline@detini.gov.uk)

**Web:** [www.consumerline.org](http://www.consumerline.org)

### OFTEC

Foxwood House  
Dobbs Lane  
Kesgrave  
Ipswich  
IP5 2QQ

**Tel:** 0845 65 85 080

**Web:** [www.oftec.co.uk](http://www.oftec.co.uk)

### Water Pollution Hotline

**Tel:** 0800 80 70 60

**Email:** [Emergency-Pollution@doeni.gov.uk](mailto:Emergency-Pollution@doeni.gov.uk)

To report a pollution incident that does not require immediate attention.



**The Consumer Council**

Elizabeth House  
116 Holywood Road  
Belfast  
BT4 1NY

**Complaints line:** 0800 121 6022

**Tele/Textphone:** 028 9067 2488

**Fax:** 028 9065 7701

**E-mail:** [info@consumercouncil.org.uk](mailto:info@consumercouncil.org.uk)  
[complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk](mailto:complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk)

**Web:** [www.consumercouncil.org.uk](http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk)

