

PRESS RELEASE

Top ten tips as oil customers are urged to buy early

Rural charity ACRE (Acton with Communities in Rural England) is urging heating oil customers to follow its top ten tips ahead of the annual 'buy early' campaign.

ACRE, the national voice for England's 38 rural community councils, says stocking up early on oil has a range of benefits. Prices and demand tend to be lower in late summer and delivery is not disrupted by increased demand and icy weather.

The top ten tips, available at www.acre.org.uk, include advice on looking after your oil tank, guarding against theft, dealing with suppliers and joining an oil buying club.

As part of ACRE's commitment to tackling fuel poverty, 25 members of its Network run oil-buying groups, varying in size from 35 up to 2,600 members. The total amount of oil purchased last year was more than 13 million litres, which made a total estimated saving of almost £650,000 for members.

Some of these schemes are providing extra help with a range of offers, such as free membership to over-70s, sourcing LPG or wood, and access to local Credit Unions to enable members to save and pay for their oil on a monthly basis.

ACRE Chief Executive Janice Banks said: "Research shows 36pc of homes in rural areas are off the gas grid, so many households rely on heating oil. In times of high demand, prices can increase rapidly, leaving the most vulnerable unable to afford to adequately heat their homes.

"We are urging households to buy their oil now so that they are prepared when the colder weather arrives and the time comes to switch on the heating."

Each year, ACRE joins forces with the Government and other organisations to spread the word that good advice is available to those households who depend on oil for their heating needs. The national Buy Early Campaign is due to start in earnest in early September.

Best Practice for Oil Buying Groups, produced by ACRE, Citizen's Advice and the Federation of Petroleum Suppliers, provides practical information to help communities set up oil buying groups.

Ends

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Notes to editors: The top ten tips are listed in full below

HEATING OIL: TOP 10 TIPS

1. Check your stock of oil - have you got any room for a summer top up? However, do not fill your fuel tank completely full during hot weather. Fuel must have room to expand.
2. Consider your future oil requirements now, and look to buy as much as possible during the summer months when prices are nearly always lower than in winter.
3. If you want to check that you are dealing with a bona fide distributor who adheres to the FPS Code of Practice, then email or ring the FPS (Federation of Petroleum Suppliers) or use the 'Find Your Local Distributor' facility on the FPS website, www.oilsave.org.uk, where you will also find advice about ordering oil and switching supplier.
4. Consider joining a local oil-buying group. Buying together makes for more efficient oil deliveries and therefore lower prices. To find your nearest local oil buying group and for more information on oil clubs, see www.acre.org.uk or www.citizensadvice.org.uk.
5. If you have difficulty in paying for your whole order in advance, look into cost-effective ways to help you to do this. Your local credit union may be able to help, and some oil buying schemes have a Pay-As-You-Go option.
6. If you are struggling to pay for fuel, check that you are receiving all the help that you are entitled to. Your local Citizens' Advice centre can help you with this.
7. Check that your oil tank is as secure as possible against oil theft. Measures you can take include installing a tank lock, an alarm that goes off if fuel drains away quickly, CCTV and security lights. Further advice is available on www.oilsave.org.uk
8. Make sure that your insurance policy covers your oil tank – most home insurance policies do not include this in the standard cover. You need to be covered for loss of fuel through theft and oil spills, and the environmental clean-up of your property and any adjacent land in the event of a leak.
9. Inspect your tank regularly and have it serviced annually by a qualified oil-fired heating engineer. For more information see www.oftec.org.uk.
10. A key way to reduce your heating bills is to make sure that your home is highly energy efficient. A Green Deal Assessment will identify the best steps to take, such as replacing your boiler or installing loft or wall insulation. Green Deal financing is also available to help cover the costs of the improvements. To find a list of assessors see www.gdorb.decc.gov.uk.