



Introduction

This Information Note explains the reasons for requiring ventilation pipework to be periodically leak tested, even when the tanks are not normally required to be tested.

The main reason for preventing petrol leaks is to reduce the risk of fire and explosion, but the environmental impact of petrol leaks can be very serious, as can the financial consequences for the operator of the site.

Why are vent pipes different to the tanks and other pipe work?

Vent lines do not normally contain liquid petrol. This means that there may be no loss of petrol when a vent line has a leak, so the usual methods of leak detection by monitoring petrol stocks or secondary containment will not pick up the leak.

Why worry about a leaking vent, then?

Unfortunately there may be times when petrol gets into a leaking vent line. This may happen when a petrol tank is overfilled, for example, but more commonly happens when there is a surge of petrol when the tank is being filled. When this happens petrol may get into the soil or be spilled on the ground where it could be ignited.

There is also the possibility that petrol vapour could escape from a leaking vent line and be ignited. This could happen when the tank is being filled, for example. The flame arrestors at the top of the vent line would not prevent flames from entering the ullage space of the tank through the hole in the vent pipe, and this could cause an explosion or serious fire.

What causes vent lines to leak?

Buried pipework can be corroded or damaged by ground movement caused by heavy traffic or severe weather conditions. Pipes can also be damaged during excavations and redevelopments on the site. There may be no way of knowing whether a vent pipe is leaking other than having it tested. Above ground pipework can also corrode, especially close to the ground, and it could also be damaged by vehicle impacts and vandalism.

Is there anything I can do to make testing the vent lines easier?

Your contractor may be able to fit an isolation valve to the vent line next time it is tested. This will make future tests much easier to do. You should ask your contractor about this.

Frequency of Leak Tests

The frequency of testing is dependant on the type and age of the pipework.

For steel or GRP pipework or other types of pipework incorporating joints below the ground, the frequency is every 5 years but increasing to every 2 years after the pipework is 30 years old.

For continuous flexible pipework (including pipework with thermo-welded joints), the frequency is every 10 years.