

## **Northern Ireland Oil Federation (NIOF) Customer Charter**

Sixty eight per cent of domestic homes in Northern Ireland use oil to heat their home.

Oil is a clean, safe, efficient fuel that provides warmth for your home.

The Members of the Northern Ireland Oil Federation (NIOF) are committed to providing customers the highest level of service. For a list of NIOF

Members go to [www.nioil.com](http://www.nioil.com).

NIOF contact details:

Telephone: 02891862916

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

E-mail: [david@nioil.com](mailto:david@nioil.com)

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NIOF Customer Charter – September 2019

## **Domestic Customer Charter**

Thank you for choosing a NIOF Member as your home heating oil supplier. Our commitment to the NIOF customer charter means that we will:

- Deliver oil according to your requirements/specifications within an agreed timeframe (subject to weather and trading conditions);
- Value our customers and engage actively with them;
- Advise you on all the services we provide;
- Ensure our services are accessible to all our customers;
- Comply with all applicable Northern Ireland Health & Safety and Environmental legislation and guidelines;
- Offer you a choice of payment options;
- Produce clear and accurate invoices and bills;
- Provide advice on where to seek advice if you have difficulty paying;
- Provide special help and advice for our most vulnerable customers;
- Make it easy for you to contact us;
- Deal quickly and effectively to try and resolve any problems that you advise us of.
- Our Code of Practice gives information regarding the many different services we provide. We have consulted with the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland on this Code of Practice

This Charter, and the associated Code of Practice, will be reviewed and updated (as necessary) by the NIOF following any significant event, or in the light of new regulations, or no later than 12 months after its introduction or any subsequent review.

NIOF Customer Charter – September 2016

### **Code of Practice**

#### **1. Paying for home heating oil**

There are a number of payment methods available to oil consumers. You can pay by cash, cheque, debit card (no charge), credit card, Direct Debit (DD), standing order, oil stamp savings schemes and electronically via PayPoint. Speak to your supplier about the best payment option that suits you and your distributor for your usage and budget.

Prices quoted over the phone and on Members' company websites must be accurate and reflect the price paid at the time of order. An over the phone quote (supported by full delivery details), unless otherwise stated is considered a verbal contract and is therefore legally binding. Members of the Northern Ireland Oil Federation have collectively agreed that their domestic heating oil contracts will include an assurance that prices quoted are those paid by the customer.

## 2. Getting the best value

Heating oil prices are quoted per volume required in litres and include 5% VAT. The price of oil goes up and down throughout the year as it is directly linked to international wholesale prices of crude oil but note it is also affected by market forces including exchange rate movements.

You have the option to shop around and compare prices before you order as there are a number of oil suppliers. Remember, there are other factors to consider as well as price including; delivery time, customer service, payment terms etc. **Always make sure you are comparing similar services.**

Ensure you ask what payment methods are available and if there are any additional charges i.e. credit card charges.

The Consumer Council conduct a weekly oil survey which will give show some of the prices you can expect to pay in your area: <http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/oil-price-watch/>

NIOF Members pride themselves in delivering a quality service all year round. However, there are very rare occasions when delivery is not possible and this may be due to severe weather and or unforeseen circumstances beyond the control of a NIOF Member.

In these circumstances, Member Companies shall not be liable to the customer for any failure to supply the full quantities of the Products ordered if such failure is due to non-availability of adequate supplies of home heating oil at the relevant terminal facility or otherwise or any circumstance of whatsoever nature which is not within the reasonable control of the Member Company. Any such cause shall be referred to as Force Majeure.

## 3. Customers with Payment difficulties

Our aim is to prevent customers finding themselves in a situation where they cannot afford to buy heating oil. We will offer advice and a range of payment methods to suit both parties.

The distributor will make clear the payment options available at the time the order is placed and identify any additional charges linked to any payment type, for example a charge for credit card payments.

The distributor will also make clear when payment is expected and any penalties for late payments. Where a customer is unable to meet the payment deadline(s) the distributor will, in the first instance, discuss the situation with the customer and try to come to an equitable agreement regarding payment. If appropriate the distributor will also provide details of debt advisory services.

## **Our Commitment**

NIOF recognises that some customers may have difficulty paying for their home heating oil. We are committed to helping customers overcome temporary or longer-term financial difficulties. We will:

- Demonstrate a positive, caring and helpful attitude;
- Listen carefully to understand the problem and establish all the facts;
- Discuss the payment options available and move towards a solution;
- If necessary, refer you to your local advice centre or the Consumer Council, to help reach a satisfactory solution.

## **Sources of advice for financial difficulties and debt:**

Consumers may wish to contact the following organisations for advice;

Debt Action NI - <http://www.debtaction-ni.net/>

Provides free, confidential and impartial debt and money advice services across NI.

CAB NI - <http://www.citizensadvice.co.uk/getadvice/>

CAB provides specialist information and advice on 14 different areas of the law including consumer issues, employment legislation, social security benefits, money advice, health, housing rights and other legal matters.

## **4. What does your oil distributor need from you?**

### Delivery

When you order oil from a NIOF member you agree to take and pay for heating oil within the suppliers' terms and conditions.

We need you to:

- Be open and honest about your situation and ability to pay for your home heating oil before ordering;
- Contact us immediately to make us aware of any difficulties you may have with paying;
- Agree to keep to a payment plan that suits both parties.

Each tanker has a minimum delivery volume which has been certified by Trading Standards. Where a distributor is unable to continue to deliver the volume ordered For example if there is insufficient room for the minimum delivery in the storage tank. Distributors may ask you to pay an additional charge commensurate with any additional costs incurred by being unable to deliver the minimum volume.

## 5. Using energy efficiently

Making even small changes to how you use energy or adaption to your home can make significant reductions to your energy costs. For example fitting a boiler jacket can save up to £45 on annual costs and replacing your boiler with a more efficient one can save as much as £300 per year (correct at July 2019 Sutherland Tables).

There are also grants available and additional help for households. For further information and advice on how you can save energy at home and you can contact Bryson Energy - Bryson Energy Advice Line Freephone 0800 1422 865

<http://www.brysonenergy.org/advice.html>

You can also get energy saving advice online from the Energy Savings Trust or by calling their free advice line: 0300 123 1234

<http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/northernireland/>

### **Making a complaint**

#### **Customer service**

For complaints relating to customer services you should follow the stages below. For complaints relating to disputed delivery amounts or quality please refer to the following section on **Quality and Measures**

#### **Step 1**

Contact your oil distributor, and give them a chance to resolve the problem. If they cannot sort out the problem to your 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 who will review your complaint. NIOF promise to:

- Deal fairly and effectively with your complaint
- Do everything practical to reach a satisfactory outcome.

Additionally NIOF aims to learn from complaints, and to improve the service the NIOF and its members provide to customers.

Write to:

David Blevings

Executive Director

NI Oil Federation

11 Ballyblack Road East

Newtownards

BT22 2BD

or alternatively e-mail [david@nioil.com](mailto:david@nioil.com)

### **Step 3**

#### **Independent Advice**

If we are unable to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction, or if at any time you are unhappy with the distributor or NIOF response, you can contact the Consumer Council. The Consumer Council is an independent consumer organisation representing consumers in the areas of transport, water and energy.

Their contact details are:

Consumer Council NI  
Floor 3 - Seatem House  
28-32 Alfred Street  
Belfast  
BT2 8EN

E mail: [contact@consumercouncil.org.uk](mailto:contact@consumercouncil.org.uk)

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

Telephone: 0800 121 6022

#### **Quality and Measures**

The members of the Oil Federation are committed to providing customers the highest level of service and satisfaction. The quality and delivery practices of oil distributors in Northern Ireland are regulated by a number of pieces of legislation by Trading Standards.

Both quality of the fuel distributors sell and the measuring equipment used must conform to these very strict standards. Before a distributor can make any deliveries metering equipment must have an NMO certificate and then must be date stamped and sealed by Trading Standards. Additionally for each delivery made via a meter a stamped ticket is produced on completion of each delivery. For distributors using electronic meters, these will also show the time of delivery. These records can also be inspected by Trading Standards.

## **Relevant legislation:**

Weights and Measures (Northern Ireland) Order 1981

The Measuring Instruments (Amendment) Regulations 2010 (SI 2010 No. 2881)

The Measuring Equipment (Liquid Fuel delivered from Road Tankers) Regulations 1983 (S.I. 1983 No. 1390) - This is overseen by the National Measurement Office ([NMO](#)) in London. All distributors wishing to deliver must use a metering system that is certified by the NMO and stamped by Trade and Standards.

In the unlikely event that you do have a complaint you can contact Consumerline. Consumerline is run in partnership between the Consumer Council and the Northern Ireland Trading Standards Service.

Their contact details are:

Consumerline  
176 Newtonbreda Road  
Belfast  
County Antrim  
BT1 3BU

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

Website: [www.consumerline.org](http://www.consumerline.org)

Telephone: 0300 123 6262

## **7. Customer Care**

We have a range of services available for consumers with special requirements.

### **Doorstep Service**

If you have a hearing difficulty we will knock the door louder, give you more time to answer the door or call you when we arrive. We will also speak clearly when we call to deliver your heating oil. If you have a mobility problem we will allow more time for you to answer the door. (Please remember to mention this when you phone, so we can inform our delivery staff).

### **Services for customers who are deaf of hearing impaired**

If you have any queries on bills, payments or moving house you can contact some of the NIOF members through their website. Alternatively, you can provide them with details of a relative or carer who can then contact us on your behalf. (This must be by letter or email prior to any delivery).

### **Carers Contact Service**

If someone helps you to manage your bills, your supplier can post or email the bills directly to them. We can also contact them if we need to reach you at any time. (This must be by letter or email prior to any delivery).

## Large Print Bill

If you have sight impairment, we can send a copy of your bill and all other correspondence in large print. Please contact us if you would like to receive your bill in large print.

## Getting the best from your service and staying safe

Have your boiler and oil fuelled appliances serviced once a year by an Oil Firing Technical Association (OFTEC) registered Technician. This will ensure that your boiler or cooker is efficient, safe, and in good working order.

### OFTEC

OFTEC is the Oil Firing Technical Association. They represent and promote the oil heating and cooking industry in the UK and the Republic of Ireland and establish common technical standards for oil fired heating and cooking appliances and oil storage tanks.

OFTEC contact details:

Foxwood House

Dobbs Lane

Kesgrave

Ipswich

IP5 2QQ

Tel: 01473 626298

Website: <http://www.oftec.org>

Plastic tanks are tough and durable, but their pipe work and fittings should be checked for signs of damage or leaks. If you live near a watercourse you should install an integrally bunded tank, which has an outer skin to contain any leakage.

Look out for any oil that has leaked out externally, particularly around pipes, valves and seams. It is the customers responsibility to ensure the boiler and tank are serviced annually by a competent person (eg: OFTEC registered)

If you need to change your current tank, it's important that you get one that is manufactured to OFTEC standards (OFS T100 for plastic tanks or OFS T200 for steel tanks).

**Carbon Monoxide-** Poor or inadequate servicing and installation can cause the generation of carbon monoxide. This is another important reason to ensure vital that your oil boiler is checked and serviced at least once a year. Carbon monoxide is a highly toxic poisonous gas. It is odourless, colourless and tasteless and therefore difficult to detect.

Some symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning may include:

- Tiredness • Nausea
- Headaches • Vomiting
- Dizziness



As a safeguard, buy and install a carbon monoxide detector. These are relatively inexpensive and easy to install. Further guidance is available at [www.hseni.gov.uk/watchout](http://www.hseni.gov.uk/watchout)

Regularly check how much oil you have left to avoid suddenly running out especially in cold weather. Running out of oil can also cause an airlock that will affect your heating system and cost money to fix.

## **Heating oil**

Heating Oil is a valuable commodity and consumers should consider taking a few simple precautions to protect your oil tank and its contents.

- Check your tank regularly and consider a tank alarm that gives an audible warning if the tank is interfered with.
- Consider installing security Lighting and CCTV Lights can not only warn you of an intruder but also alert neighbours
- If your tank is visible from outside your property disguise your tank. Consider fencing, trellis and defensive planting but be aware of the separation distances required per building regulations
- Site your tank cleverly 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.
- Consider locking access gates, keeping your garden or drive gates closed and securely locked can prevent theft

Remember your distributor will need access to deliver oil. If the distributor cannot access the tank at time of delivery due to a locked gate, they incur charges. Some distributors apply a charge if they are unable to make a delivery.

## **Appendix A Payment Options**

### **For Central Heating Oil**

#### **Cash**

All distributors accept cash and this may be at time of delivery or prior to delivery if a new customer. Some distributors will accept monthly/weekly cash payments (similar to Direct Debit) but check with your supplier.

#### **Cheque**

Some distributors will accept a cheque but many will insist on it clearing before delivering oil. With the availability of debit and credit cards this method is reducing in popularity.

#### **Debit Card/Credit Card**

Most distributors will accept credit and debit cards (there is no charge for using a debit card). Simply supply your card details at time of ordering. The difference between a "debit card" and a "credit card" is that the debit card deducts the balance from a deposit account, like a checking account, whereas the credit card allows the consumer to spend money on credit to the issuing bank. In other words, a debit card uses the money you have, and a credit card uses money that you will have to pay back to the credit card company. There are usually costs associated with using a credit card. Check what charge applies before you place your order.

#### **Online**

Many distributors now offer an online ordering service. This means you can order oil at any time of the day or night but this usually requires debit or credit card at time of order (see above). Remember to check the small print regarding delivery windows (time for delivery); charge for credit card use and some on line sites require a premium payment for same day delivery.

### **Budgeting options**

#### **PayPoint**

This budgeting scheme is designed to help householders save in advance for their central heating oil.

Oil suppliers participating in the PayPoint scheme will issue their customers with a personal magnetic strip card. By using this method you can make a payment as often as you wish by taking the card along with your cash to a local PayPoint outlet. This enables you to spread the cost of your home heating oil.

To order oil from your supplier, contact them to see how much is in your account. This scheme helps budgeting and you should have the amount you require to order paid before delivery. This may be topped up with cash at the distributor's discretion when ordering.

The budgeting scheme is free and easy to use for consumers, available at over 500 retail locations in NI and the minimum payment accepted is £10. (And in £5 increments over and above £10)

List of distributors offering PayPoint can be found [HERE](#);

### **Direct Debit or Standing Order**

Many distributors operate a direct debit scheme and householders can arrange for an agreed monthly sum to be debited from their bank to the distributors account to build up credit for future oil use.

This avoids the need to pay a small number of large bills irregularly when oil is delivered by spreading the cost of your oil usage throughout the year. You simply pay a set amount each month by Direct Debit.

### **Oil Stamp Saving Scheme**

The Oil Stamp Saving Scheme enables householders to budget for their heating oil. Check with your oil supplier to see if they accept stamps and which stamps they accept.

An oil stamp saving card can be obtained from various outlets in Northern Ireland. £5.00 stamps can then be purchased at participating outlets and put on the card. You can buy these stamps as often as you wish enabling you to spread the cost of your home heating oil. The card can then be used as payment or part-payment for your oil with participating oil suppliers.

Once you are ready to order your oil contact your preferred supplier and let him or her know the amount of oil you require, and the value of stamps you have saved. Also check with the supplier to see how they accept the payment card. Please do not post completed stamp cards through the post as stamps should be treated the same as cash.

### **Emergency Oil Drums**

These are emergency 20 litre drums of kerosene that can be purchased from distributors and many retail locations throughout Northern Ireland. **These are only intended for emergency use** when you have run out of oil. You can avail of an emergency drum to keep your heating going until a regular delivery can be made. Please note these are for emergency only and have a much higher price per litre compared to bulk fills.

These are not recommended as a regular way to purchase home heating oil  
Treat the contents with caution and dispose of the drum correctly  
Observe the hazard warnings on the drum

### **General guidance on ordering;**

1. Check what budgeting options your current distributor offers
2. Ask if they are a Member of NIOF and do they have a customer charter in place
3. Order 500 litres or more as the price per litre is normally lower the more you order
4. Consider payment options that suit you.

**Further information; NI Oil Federation; T: 02891862916 W: [www.nioil.com](http://www.nioil.com)**