



An Extended Guide · No. 2054

Propane and Fuel-Oil Tank Monitors

Never run out in January — a
gentle, plain-English guide

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

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Never guessing how much fuel is left

There's a particular worry that comes with heating by propane or fuel oil out in the country: running out on the coldest night of the year, with the furnace dead and the roads bad. A tank monitor takes that worry away. It reads the tank and tells your phone exactly how much you have — no more trudging out in the snow to squint at a gauge.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. For 30-plus years I've helped folks make the gear around their homes a little kinder to live with. This guide is me at your kitchen table, explaining tank monitors plainly — what they are, how they help, and the one phone call to make first that might save you buying anything at all.

Here's the whole idea in a sentence: a small sensor sits on your tank's gauge, reads the level, and sends it to your phone, so you can check from your chair whether it's time to order. In deep winter, that's real peace of mind.

But before you spend a dime, there's an important first step, and I want it front and center: **call your propane or fuel-oil supplier.** Many already offer a monitor, or keep-full delivery, and sometimes it costs you nothing. We'll cover that first.

★ No wrong question here

If you'd like someone to help you sort out whether you even need to buy a monitor, or get one working with your phone, that's what I do. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042. I don't sell the gear, so the advice is only ever advice.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only these things, you already understand tank monitors.

- ❑ A tank monitor reads your tank's gauge and sends the level to your phone.
- ❑ FIRST, call your supplier — many already offer a monitor and/or keep-full delivery, sometimes free to customers.
- ❑ Keep-full (automatic) delivery means they watch the level and top you up, so you may not need your own monitor at all.
- ❑ If you still want your own, some monitors are universal add-ons that fit many tanks.
- ❑ The real payoff is peace of mind in deep winter — no more guessing, no more trudging out to the gauge.
- ❑ Never let the tank run all the way empty; with oil especially, that can mean a service call to restart.

✓ Make the phone call first

Before you buy anything, phone your supplier and simply ask: 'Do you offer a tank monitor, and do you do keep-full delivery?' That one call may solve the whole thing for you.

The important first step — call your supplier

I put this right up front because it's the step folks skip, and it's the one that most often saves money and bother. Please make this call before anything else.

Many propane and fuel-oil suppliers already offer a **tank monitor** to their customers — sometimes they install it, sometimes they lend it, and sometimes it's included at no extra cost because it helps them, too. They like knowing your level, because it means they can deliver efficiently and you never run out on them.

Just as often, they offer **keep-full** or **automatic** delivery, where they track your usage and the weather and simply show up to top you off before you'd ever run low. With that, you may not need a monitor of your own at all — the supplier is doing the watching for you.

So the first call is simple. Ask: do you offer a monitor? Do you do keep-full delivery? What does each cost, if anything? The answers shape everything that follows — and may mean you're done before you started.

✓ Ask these three things

On the phone, ask: (1) Do you offer a tank monitor for my tank? (2) Do you do automatic keep-full delivery? (3) Is there a cost for either? Jot the answers down — they decide whether you need to buy anything.

How a tank monitor works

There's nothing complicated here. If you've ever glanced at the round gauge on top of your tank, you already know the hard part.

Your tank has a **gauge** — the little dial that reads out a percentage, like the one you check in the snow. A tank monitor is a small device that simply reads that gauge for you, automatically, around the clock, and sends the number to your phone through an app.

Instead of bundling up and walking out to look, you glance at your phone from your chair: '62 percent — plenty.' Most monitors also keep a little history, so you can see how fast you're using fuel and guess when you'll want to order next.

The reading travels to your phone one of two ways, depending on the monitor: over your **home internet**, or over **cell service** like a phone. Which one matters out here, where the tank may sit far from the house, so we'll give that its own page.

✓ It just reads the gauge you already have

A monitor doesn't change your tank or your fuel — it only reads the same gauge you'd read yourself, and saves you the trip. That's why it's such a simple, low-worry little gadget.

Why this matters most in January

I set these up most often for folks who've had one bad winter scare — and never want another. Let me speak to why it brings such comfort.

Running out of heating fuel is never convenient, but in the depth of an Ohio winter it can be frightening — a cold house, a furnace that won't run, icy roads that slow a delivery, and the cost and hassle of an emergency fill. For someone who lives alone, or who doesn't get around as easily as they used to, that's a genuine worry.

A monitor quietly lifts that worry. You can see your level any time, from the warmth of your chair, and order in good time rather than in a panic. No more guessing, no more trudging out through the snow to the tank, no more that sinking feeling when the furnace sounds different.

And it's a comfort to family, too. If the reading can be shared, a son or daughter can keep half an eye on a parent's fuel level from their own phone, and nudge an order along before it's ever a problem.

★ A small thing that helps a lot

Of all the little gadgets I set up, a tank monitor is one folks are most grateful for — the winter worry it takes away is out of all proportion to its size. Glad to help you get one going. Call (330) 200-8042.

Keep-full delivery — letting them do the watching

Sometimes the best 'monitor' is no monitor at all — just an arrangement with your supplier. This is worth understanding before you buy anything.

With **keep-full** (also called automatic or will-call-free) delivery, your supplier tracks how much fuel you typically use, watches the weather, and schedules a delivery to top you off before you'd ever run low. You don't call them; they just come. For a lot of folks, that alone solves the whole worry — the tank simply stays full.

The trade-off is that you give up a little control over when you buy, and you'll want to understand how they price it. Some folks like the hands-off ease; others prefer to watch the level themselves and order when a price looks good — which is exactly where your own monitor shines.

✓ Monitor and keep-full can work together

You don't have to choose. Plenty of folks are on keep-full delivery and still like having their own monitor to glance at — the supplier keeps it full, and the monitor lets them see it's working. Belt and suspenders.

How the monitor reaches your phone

The tank is often a good way from the house, so how the reading gets from the tank to your phone is the one practical thing to sort out.

Monitors send their reading one of two ways. Some use your **home internet** — which means your Wi-Fi needs to reach out to where the tank sits. If the tank is close to the house, that's usually fine. If it's out past where your Wi-Fi fades, you'd need to extend the signal first — my guide on getting the internet out to the barn or shop covers exactly that.

Others use **cell service**, the way a phone does, sending the reading over the mobile network. That's handy when the tank is far from the house or your Wi-Fi won't reach — as long as there's decent cell coverage where the tank sits. These sometimes carry a small ongoing fee for the cell connection, so ask about that; prices change, so check current listings.

✓ Check the signal at the tank

Before you choose, walk out to the tank with your phone and see whether you have Wi-Fi or cell signal standing right there. That tells you which kind of monitor will actually work at your place.

A supplier's monitor or a universal one?

If you do decide to get your own monitor, there are two roads. Here is the honest difference between them.

A **supplier's monitor** is one your fuel company provides and often installs. The big advantage is that they handle the reading and tie it to your account, and it's matched to your tank. The reading may also feed their delivery system, so they know to come. This is the easiest road when they offer it.

A **universal monitor** is one you buy yourself that fits many common tank gauges. It's the road for folks whose supplier doesn't offer one, or who want to watch the level independently. The thing to check before buying is that it fits **your** tank and **your** gauge — tanks and gauges vary, so match it carefully.

	Supplier's monitor	Universal monitor
Who sets it up	Often the supplier	You (or Bill)
Fits your tank	Matched for you	Check it fits first
Ties to deliveries	Usually yes	Usually no

✓ **Match it to your gauge before you buy**

If you go universal, confirm it fits your tank's specific gauge before ordering — a photo of your gauge sent to the seller (or to me) settles it fast. A monitor that doesn't fit your gauge helps no one.

Propane and fuel oil — a few differences

Both are heating fuels you don't want to run out of, but they behave a little differently, and it's worth knowing which you have.

Propane tanks read a percentage on a dial gauge, and most folks are told to reorder when they get down to around a quarter or a third full — partly so the delivery truck has room, and partly so you're never cutting it close. A monitor reading that dial lets you reorder in good time without thinking about it.

Fuel oil tanks also have a gauge, often a float you can see. One important difference: if an oil system runs completely dry, it often needs a service call to prime and restart the furnace — it's not as simple as just getting more oil. That makes watching the level with a monitor especially worthwhile with oil heat.

! Don't run an oil tank dry

With fuel oil especially, letting the tank run all the way empty can mean a no-heat furnace that needs a technician to restart, not just a refill. A monitor that keeps you from ever hitting empty is cheap insurance against that cold, costly surprise.

Two kinds of places, two sets of needs

Whether a monitor is worth it, and which kind, depends on where your tank sits and how you buy fuel. A tank beside a town house is a different story from one out past the barn.

If your place is close to town

The tank is usually near the house, your Wi-Fi likely reaches it, and a delivery truck can get to you even in rough weather. That keeps your choices simple.

- A Wi-Fi monitor is often the easy, no-extra-fee choice when the tank's close.
- Deliveries come quickly, so a monitor is comfort more than necessity.
- Keep-full delivery is easy to arrange and rarely leaves you waiting.
- Still a lovely peace of mind for anyone who'd rather not check the gauge.

If you're out on acreage or a working farm

Now the tank may sit far from the house, past where Wi-Fi reaches, and bad roads can slow a winter delivery. Here a monitor earns its keep.

- A cell-based monitor often beats Wi-Fi when the tank is far from the house.
- Running low in a storm means a slow delivery — order early, with margin.
- Keep-full delivery is especially valuable where roads get bad in winter.
- If you heat with oil, never risk running dry out where help is far off.

★ Not sure what makes sense for your tank?

Tell me how you heat, how far your tank sits from the house, and whether you're already on keep-full delivery. I'll help you figure out whether you need a monitor at all, and which kind if you do. Call (330) 200-8042.

What you'll actually see on your phone

Let me set your mind at ease about the phone part, because that's what folks worry about most — and it's simpler than you'd think.

The app is usually just one plain screen: a big number or a picture of a tank showing how full you are, like a fuel gauge in a car. A glance tells you all you need: plenty, getting there, or time to order. You don't have to fiddle with settings or learn anything fancy — you open it and read the number.

Most apps will also send you a **low-fuel alert** — a little message when you drop below a level you choose, say a third full. That means you don't even have to remember to check; the app taps you on the shoulder in good time. Set that alert once and you can mostly forget about it.

✓ Set a low-fuel alert and relax

The whole trick is the alert. Set it to warn you at a comfortable level — a third full is common — and then you needn't check at all. The phone tells you when it's time to order, and not before.

Letting family keep half an eye on it

One of the kindest things a monitor does is let the people who worry about you share in the watching, without hovering.

Most monitor apps let you add another person, so a son, daughter, or trusted neighbor can see the fuel level and the low-fuel alert on their own phone. For a grown child who worries about a parent heating alone out in the country, that's a real comfort — they'll know before the tank gets low, and can help arrange a delivery if needed.

It works the other way, too. If you'd rather not fuss with the phone at all, you can let a family member be the one who watches it, and they simply tell you when to order — or order for you. The monitor does the work; a loved one does the glancing.

✓ Pick who should also get the alert

Decide early whether you'd like anyone else to see the level. Adding them is usually easy at setup, and it means the low-fuel warning reaches someone even if you're away or not checking. There's comfort in that for everyone.

Knowing when to reorder

A monitor is only as useful as the habit around it. A little margin is the whole secret, especially out here.

The common wisdom is to reorder propane at around a quarter to a third full, and never to let any heating tank get down near empty. That cushion matters double in the country, where a winter storm can delay a delivery for days and where you may be at the end of a long route.

Use the monitor's history to learn your own rhythm. In a cold snap you'll burn through fuel far faster than in mild weather, and seeing that on the app helps you order before a hard freeze rather than during one. When in doubt, order early — fuel in the tank is never wasted, and a full tank before a storm is money and worry well spent.

✓ Order with room to spare

Build in a buffer. Reordering at a third full rather than waiting for the needle to drop means a slow storm delivery never leaves you cold. The monitor shows you the level — let it show you early.

Deciding what you actually need

Pull it together and the right answer for you is usually clear — and often simpler, and cheaper, than you feared.

Start with that first call to your supplier. If they offer a monitor or keep-full delivery that suits you, you may be done right there. If you still want your own eyes on the level, decide whether a Wi-Fi monitor reaches your tank or you need a cell-based one, make sure it fits your gauge, and set it up with a low-fuel alert.

Don't overthink it. This is one of the simplest, most reassuring little systems there is — a gadget that reads a gauge and taps your shoulder when it's time to order. Match it to your tank and your signal, and you're set for winters to come.

★ Let me help you decide

If you're not sure whether to take your supplier's offer or get your own, I'm glad to think it through with you — no gear to sell, just a plain opinion about what'll serve you best. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common mistakes to sidestep

A few avoidable slip-ups account for most of the tank-monitor regret. Now you'll see them coming.

- **Buying a monitor before calling the supplier** — who may have offered one, or keep-full delivery, for little or nothing.
- **Getting a Wi-Fi monitor** for a tank your Wi-Fi doesn't reach, then wondering why it never updates.
- **A universal monitor that doesn't fit your gauge** — always confirm the fit before you order.
- **Not setting a low-fuel alert**, so the monitor only helps if you remember to look.
- **Waiting too long to reorder**, so a storm delivery delay leaves you cold — order with room to spare.

! The costliest one — running dry

The mistake that really hurts is letting the tank run empty, which with oil can mean a no-heat furnace and a service call. A monitor's whole job is to make sure that never happens — so set the alert and heed it.

A simple planning checklist

Walk through these and you'll know exactly what, if anything, to buy.

- ☐ I've called my supplier and asked about a monitor and keep-full delivery.
- ☐ I know whether keep-full delivery would ease my mind on its own.
- ☐ I know whether my tank is close enough for Wi-Fi, or needs a cell monitor.
- ☐ If buying universal, I've confirmed it fits my tank's gauge.
- ☐ I know whether I heat with propane or fuel oil.
- ☐ I plan to set a low-fuel alert at a comfortable level.
- ☐ I've decided whether a family member should also see the level.

★ Bring me the answers

Make that supplier call, fill in these blanks, and the decision is nearly made. Send me what you found and I'll help you finish it. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

Keeping it working, year after year

A tank monitor asks almost nothing of you once it's set, but a glance now and then keeps it honest — which matters, since you're trusting it with your winter heat.

Every so often, compare what the app says to the actual gauge on the tank — a quick walk out on a nice day. If they match, all's well. If the app reading looks stuck or stale, the monitor may need a battery or may have lost its signal, and that's the time to sort it, not in a January cold snap.

Check that the low-fuel alert still comes through, and that any family member who watches it still gets it. If you changed your phone or your home internet, make sure the app reconnected. None of this takes long; it just keeps the thing trustworthy when you lean on it most.

✓ Check it before heating season

Each fall, before the cold sets in, take one walk out to compare the app to the gauge and test the alert. Catching a tired battery in October beats discovering it the hard way in January.

Other things worth keeping an eye on

If a tank monitor appeals to you, there are a few cousins worth knowing about — the same comfort, pointed at other worries.

The same long-range sensor idea that watches a far tank can also keep an eye on a freezer, a well house, or a stock tank heater — my guide on long-range sensors covers all of that. If you've got a generator for the winter outages, there are monitors for those, too, so you know it's ready before you need it.

The thread through all of it is the same: a small sensor that watches something you'd otherwise have to go check yourself, and tells your phone in good time. Start with the one worry that nags you most — for many folks out here that's the fuel tank — and add others only if they'd truly ease your mind.

✓ One worry at a time

You don't have to wire up the whole farm. Solve the fuel-tank worry first, live with it a season, and add a freezer or well-house sensor later only if you find you'd sleep better for it.

What to do yourself, and when to call

Good news: most of this is friendly to do yourself. The fiddly parts are where a patient hand helps.

Making that first call to the supplier, deciding between keep-full and your own monitor, and reading the app are all things you can do on your own — and the whole point is to make your life simpler, not busier. If the supplier installs their monitor, there's nothing for you to do at all.

Where I'm glad to help: fitting a universal monitor to your gauge and getting its app set up on your phone, making sure the signal reaches (and extending your internet out to the tank if that's the snag), and setting the low-fuel alert and adding family. The monitor itself sits on the gauge and touches no fuel lines — but if anything about your tank or its fittings seems off, that's a job for your fuel company, not a gadget helper.

★ One friendly visit

If the phone-and-app part feels daunting, that's exactly where I shine. I'll get the monitor reading, the alert set, and family added, and show you the one screen you'll ever need — 30-day come-back-free. Call (330) 200-8042.

Questions to ask your supplier or seller

These few questions get you to the right answer and keep you from buying something you didn't need.

Q: Do you offer a tank monitor, and is there any cost?

Ask your supplier this first. Many provide one to customers, sometimes free, because it helps them deliver efficiently. It may solve your whole question in one call.

Q: Do you offer keep-full or automatic delivery?

If they watch your level and top you up before you run low, you may not need a monitor at all. Ask how they price it, and whether it fits how you like to buy.

Q: Will a monitor reach my phone over Wi-Fi, or do I need cell?

This depends on how far your tank is from the house. If Wi-Fi won't reach the tank, you want a cell-based monitor — and should ask about any ongoing fee for the cell connection.

Q: Will this monitor fit my particular tank and gauge?

Especially for a universal monitor you buy yourself, confirm it fits your gauge before ordering. A photo of your gauge usually settles it quickly.

✓ There's no silly question

If a seller won't plainly tell you whether a monitor fits your tank or how it reaches your phone, find another. A straight answer to a straight question is the least you should expect.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most from folks thinking about a tank monitor, answered plainly.

Q: Do I even need to buy a monitor?

Maybe not. Call your supplier first — many offer a monitor, or keep-full delivery where they watch your level and top you up automatically. Either may give you all the peace of mind you're after without buying a thing.

Q: How does the monitor know how much fuel I have?

It simply reads the gauge already on your tank — the same dial you'd walk out to check — and sends that reading to your phone. It doesn't touch the fuel; it just reads the gauge for you, around the clock.

Q: What if my tank is far from the house and Wi-Fi won't reach?

Then you want a monitor that uses cell service instead of your Wi-Fi, as long as there's cell coverage at the tank. Or extend your internet out to the tank — my barn-internet guide covers how. Check the signal out there first.

Q: Is it hard to read on the phone?

Not at all. The app is usually one plain screen showing how full you are, like a car's fuel gauge. Set a low-fuel alert once, and the phone will even tap you on the shoulder when it's time to order — you needn't remember to check.

★ Still weighing it up?

Never running out of heat on a cold night is worth a great deal, and this is one of the simplest ways to buy that peace of mind. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll sort out what's right for your tank.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made keeping an eye on your propane or fuel-oil tank feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home — barn, shop, and all — work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't do the licensed electrical, trenching, or tower work myself — for that I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

Three Roads to Peace of Mind

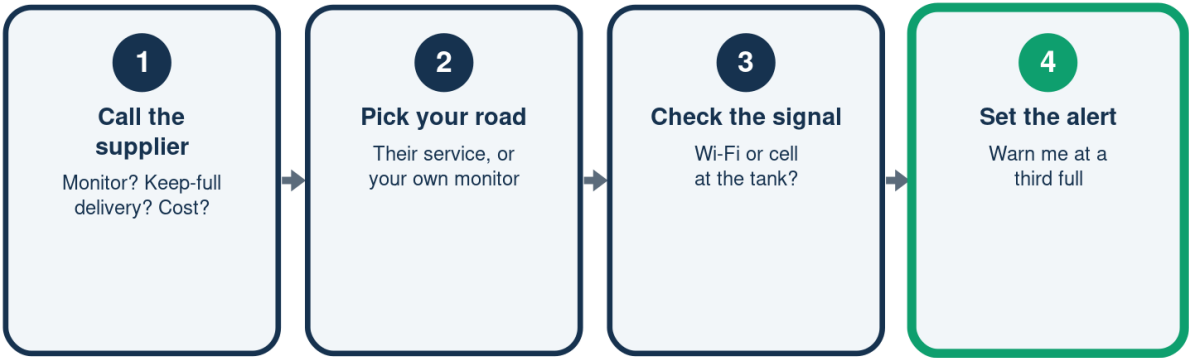
You may not need to buy a thing

	What it is	Who does the watching
Keep-full delivery	Auto top-ups	Your supplier
Supplier's monitor	They provide it	You and them
Your own monitor	You buy & set up	You (and family)

Call your supplier first -- the easiest road may already be offered.

Sorting It in Four Steps

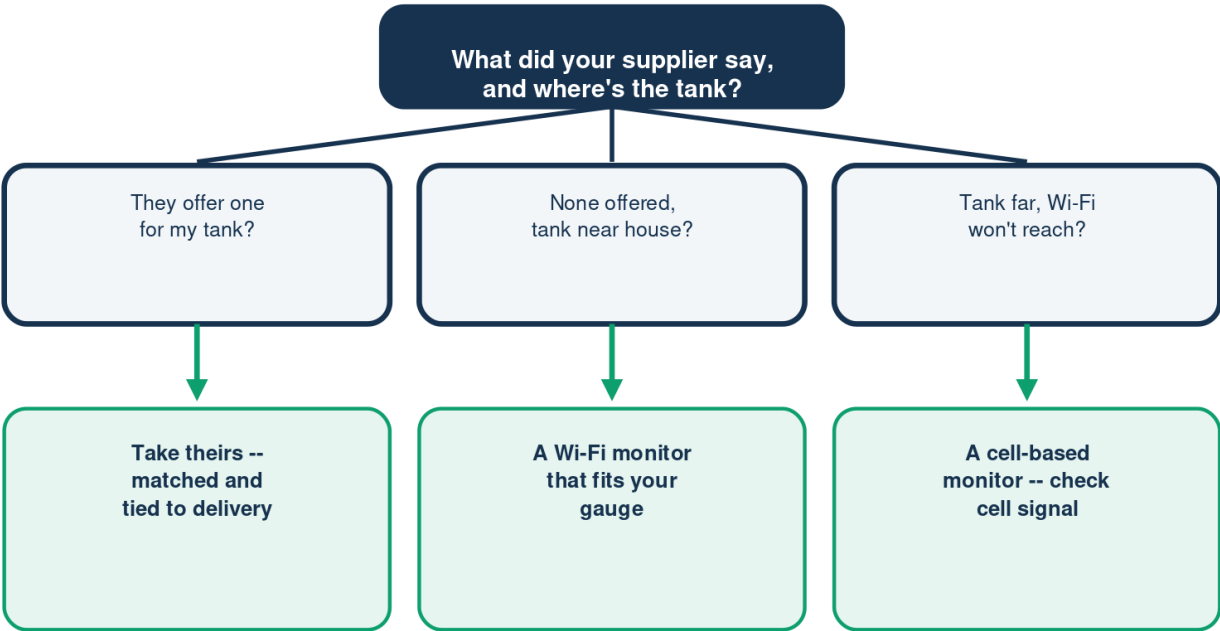
The calm way to never run out



That first phone call may answer the whole question for you.

Which Monitor Fits My Tank?

Let your supplier and your signal decide



A universal monitor must fit your tank's gauge -- confirm before you buy.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

How the Reading Reaches Your Phone

Pick the one that works at your tank

	Best when	Watch out for
Over Wi-Fi	Tank near house	Wi-Fi must reach tank
Over cell	Tank far out	Needs cell signal

Stand at the tank and check what signal you have before choosing.



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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

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