



Driving Oil Distribution Forward

Customer Charter.

A Guide to Good Service

www.fpsonline.co.uk | www.oilsave.org.uk

WHO ARE THE FPS?

The Federation of Petroleum Suppliers is a Trade Association which represents most, but not all, heating oil distributors in the UK. Our members distribute over 80% of the domestic heating oil used on the mainland UK.

WHY A CUSTOMER CHARTER?

The FPS members strive to provide a good service to their customers. This Customer Charter, which is based on a much more comprehensive FPS Code of Practice (CoP), has been created to help ensure that customers can expect good service and understand clearly how their FPS distributor should operate and what constitutes good service.

Please note that this Charter only covers deliveries to domestic customers of a distributor who is a member of the FPS. It is not applicable to commercial organisations or non FPS distribution companies. The full Code of Practice is available from the Oilsave website www.oilsave.org.uk.

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT FROM A FPS DISTRIBUTOR?

Whether you are a first time buyer from a distributor or a regular customer you can expect to:

1. Be dealt with fairly
2. Receive information and advice regarding the products and services that you receive.
3. Be Given a clear price and delivery time for any order you place. (You can request email or text confirmation of the price from most distributors.)
4. Be provided with the range of payment choices which the distributor offers. Typical options include:
 - a. Payment by credit/debit card
 - b. Monthly payment plan
5. Receive information regarding the available payment methods and any additional charges which may apply, for example for using a credit charge or for an emergency delivery. You should discuss with your distributor which payment method is used.
6. Whether you have an existing or new contract with a distributor, they should provide you with all the terms and conditions of that contract. This includes conditions relating to any cancellation of that contract.
7. Be given reasonable notice if agreed delivery schedules cannot be met.
8. Cancel any order within two working days of the agreed delivery date without charge.

NB. A monthly payment plan allows you to make regular payments to spread the cost of paying for your oil. Where you pay the distributor a regular amount, for example monthly direct debit, then you will receive a statement at least once per year giving you your account balance. Where a surplus exists you can request that the balance be returned to you within 21 days.

THINK SMART!



If you choose to move to a monthly payment scheme, discuss the details with your distributor first. It is important that you build up a credit in your account before taking the first delivery. It is wise, therefore, to start such an account in periods of low demand, such as spring or summer, so that you can make some payments into your account to build up your credit. You should discuss with the distributor which payment method suits you best.

You should also note that if you are a new customer for a distributor and have no credit history with them, then you will probably need to pay in advance for your first order.

WHAT DOES YOUR DISTRIBUTOR EXPECT FROM YOU?

In order to make the delivery process run smoothly a distributor will expect the following from their customers:

1. All of the relevant information for an order be given when the order is placed. (see annexe 1 for the FPS approved order form)
2. Have easy and safe access to the tank or filling point.
3. Have a safe storage system into which they can discharge the heating oil, this includes there being sufficient room in the storage tank to receive the order, the tank being properly installed and in good condition.

THINK SMART!



A distributor may still make a reasonable charge on you to cover the delivery cost even if no oil is delivered. When you place your order check whether your distributor will charge in these situations.

3. Finding that there is not room in your tank for the delivery, or
4. They cannot fit all of that order into your tank.

A delivery might be stopped because a distributor:

1. Cannot gain access to your tank or filling point
2. Has concerns regarding health and safety or environmental issues which can be attributed to a customer or their installation.

Do not place orders with more than one distributor at a time. If you place orders with two or more distributors at the same time then they are within their rights to deliver the oil and request payment, or charge a reasonable amount for the aborted delivery.



PLACING AN ORDER

There are two ways in which you can order heating oil:

A. SPOT

This is the most common method of ordering heating oil, where you phone a distributor to request a quote and place an order with the distributor over the phone or internet and ask them to deliver your order. In this case the agreed price (including VAT and all other charges) quoted by the distributor, and to which you agree, is fixed for that order i.e. the distributor cannot subsequently change the price for that order. The only exception is the rate of VAT, which if changed by HMRC will mean the order price will be amended to take account of that change. The FPS advises its members that if they are unable to provide a price, due to, for example, adverse weather conditions or fuel supply problems, then they should not provide a price.

THINK SMART!



If you are contacting a number of distributors for a quote then make sure that all the prices you receive include the cost of VAT payable and all other applicable charges so that you can make a fair comparison of prices.

B. CONTRACT

This is where you have signed a contract with your supplier to provide you with heating oil. Typically this involves a regular payment to your distributor in return for which they will provide your heating oil when required. This may, but not necessarily, involve the use of monitoring equipment fixed onto your tank. If you enter into such a contract with your supplier then you should expect regular statements (at least annually) from them informing you on the state of your account and you should be able to have any surplus returned to you within 21 days should you so wish.

You should also be able to make more frequent requests regarding your balance without being charged provided the time between requests is reasonable.

We would also suggest that if you are on contracted deliveries that from time to time you check the price of the oil you receive against the prices quoted by other distributors in your area to ensure that you are receiving a reasonable price for the service you receive.

CANCELLING AN ORDER

Once you have placed an order the FPS Code of Practice allows it to be cancelled up to two days prior to the scheduled delivery without charge. For periods less than this, some distributors may charge a reasonable fee for the cancellation. This should be contained within their terms and conditions, but if you are unsure we recommend that you check with your distributor when the order is placed as to what their cancellation period is and what charge applies.

DEALING WITH VULNERABLE CUSTOMERS

If a distributor is aware that one of its customers falls within this category, or where Government or local authorities are able to share data on those customers that they know are chronically sick, disabled or frail, then oil distributors will work with the relevant authority and take all reasonable steps to deliver essential supplies of heating oil to such customers at times when demand exceeds supply or resource capability.

PRICES

When obtaining prices from a number of distributors the lowest price may not necessarily represent the best value. Below is a table indicating the saving made depending on the price difference.

SAVINGS	500 LTRs	1000 LTRs	2000 LTRs
0.1 ppl	£0.50	£1.00	£2.00
0.5 ppl	£2.50	£5.00	£10.00
1 ppl	£5.00	£10.00	£20.00
5 ppl	£25.00	£50.00	£100.00

(Using this table you can calculate your actual savings. All you need to do then is decide if it is worth changing your regular supplier for the possible savings you could achieve.)

THINK SMART!



It is worth carefully considering when you order your heating oil. We would recommend that you try to avoid ordering oil in December as this is when the distributors are very busy and the average price for oil tends to be higher. By ordering earlier you could save money and avoid extended delivery times.



WHAT IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG?

Where things do not go as expected and you feel you have a legitimate complaint, the FPS have a complaints procedure which can be followed.

BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

If you feel that a distributor has broken any of the clauses within the FPS Code of Practice you should, in the first instance, contact the distributor with your complaint.

Most complaints will be quickly and efficiently dealt with by your distributor. There will be no charge for this unless it requires the services of a competent third party such as a testing laboratory.

Should your complaint not be dealt with, then please look at the complaints procedure on the Oilsave website (www.oilsave.org). If you need to make a complaint to the FPS there will be no charge for the FPS to investigate your complaint.

If you are still not satisfied then you can take your case to the FPS Ombudsman for a decision. There is a charge for this and both you and the distributor will be required to pay the full fee in advance. Depending on the outcome of the ombudsman decision full or partial refunds may be made to both parties. For example, if the distributor is found completely at fault, then you will receive your payment back. If you are found at fault the distributor will receive their payment back.

Where the ombudsman feels that both sides were at fault, then the refund will be determined by the Ombudsman. So if the Ombudsman felt that both parties contributed equally to cause the problem, both parties would receive 50% of their payment back.

CUSTOMERS WITH PAYMENT DIFFICULTIES

If you are unable to pay for the fuel received within the agreed period, contact your distributor as soon as possible to discuss the situation. If they are unable to help you directly, they should refer you to a third party debt advisory service. A list of useful contacts can be found at the end of this document.

We advise our members to use the report 'How to do the right thing' produced by the Addressing Financial Difficulty Working group (chaired by Citizens Advice) which sets out examples of good practice in debt collection.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Citizens Advice
www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Age UK
www.ageuk.org.uk

Consumer Futures
www.consumerfutures.org.uk

Trading Standards Institute
www.tradingstandards.gov.uk

ACRE
www.acre.org.uk

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