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June 2007, ANSONIA, CT- A new Web-based system that will enable dealers to offer remote monitoring of residential oil tanks is coming to market this month.

Oil Equipment Manufacturing Inc. (OEM), of Ansonia, Conn., has introduced VisiTank™, which uses an ultrasonic tank sensor to detect the oil level and a “smart” modem to transmit data from the tank to a central server. The oil dealer then logs onto the server and downloads tank levels on his customers’ tanks and uses the information to prevent run-outs and improve delivery efficiency.

OEM President Einar Gudjohnsen told *Oil & Energy* that VisiTank™ is intended to complement Degree Day forecasting by helping Oilheat dealers keep tabs on accounts where usage is irregular or unknown. These can include apartment complexes, vacation homes, ski chalets, and homes that use a mix of fuels, such as wood and oil. Oil Dealers could also use VisiTank™ on new accounts until a K-factor is established and then relocate it to another account. The system is also applicable for rural accounts. “In some cases you can increase the efficiency of delivering to rural accounts. You want to know how much you’re putting in so you don’t waste a drive all the way out there for 80 gallons,” Gudjohnsen said. For certain accounts, such as “snowbird” homes or vacation homes, the system could be a revenue earner where the customers are charged for the remote monitoring service. The system also could be used on any account where the company wants to make a strong impression. Gudjohnsen said he is already in discussions with dealers who are considering using VisiTank™ on most of their accounts.

### **Ultrasonic Technology**

The system begins with the tank monitoring unit, which is the Rocket Ultrasonic Sensor. The Rocket mounts on top of the tank in one of the available openings and uses ultrasonic technology to detect the fuel level. OEM started selling the Rocket about three years ago as an in-home monitoring system that enables a homeowner to read their fuel level on a digital readout without going to the basement or outside.

The Rocket transmits wirelessly to a receiver when used for in-home monitoring. The Rocket came to market as a local monitoring system, “but it was always the plan to develop the follow-on, which was a remote system.”

“The whole idea of remote monitoring is well established in the commercial world,” said Gudjohnsen. “Attempts have been made before in the residential world, but until now, no one has hit the mark in terms of simplicity and cost.”

In the VisiTank™ system, the Rocket transmits to a modem, which is plugged into an AC outlet using a 12 volt adapter and also attached to a phone line. The modem can be situated as far as 150 feet away from the tank. Using a toll-free number, the modem automatically dials in to a secure, redundant server at OEM’s facility at an interval defined by the oil company, which can be anywhere from every few hours to every 30 days. The shorter intervals are recommended only for high usage circumstances such as a diesel tank at a job site, Gudjohnsen said. In most homes, levels need be checked only once every few days. OEM provides free Client software for the oil dealer’s Windows based PC.

The data from each account is stored on the server operated by OEM. The data is then downloaded to the oil company's computer over the Internet with one click of a button. Dealers need not worry about the security of their customer information because the data on the Server does not contain to any personal account information.

To build demand with no up-front costs, OEM will initially offer the equipment in a lease-to-buy agreement where dealers pay \$8.50 per month for each VisiTank™ installation kit and then pay a \$25 buyout fee after 12 months. Dealers will also be able to purchase VisiTank™ directly through OEM's regional and national wholesale distribution network. There is a separate monitoring fee of \$1.50 per month for each modem.

### **Simple Installation**

A typical installation takes a technician about 30 minutes, and no special expertise is required. "It's relatively pain-free. The most difficult part might be getting the plug out of the tank," Gudjohnsen said. "After that it's pretty straightforward. There is no hard-wiring involved." For installations which already have the Rocket installed, only the Modem along with the power adapter and phone cord are needed. OEM plans to offer installation training at their facility to prospective customers.

The Rocket unit reads the tank level by measuring the distance between the sensor and the top surface of the fuel. The technician must note the type of tank, which is then entered in the profile for that account using the Client software. The software has a tank definition section where the relevant information on all common tank types is available. If the customer has a tank that is not on the list, the installer must measure the tank's dimensions, which are then entered into the account's database using the client software. An installation data form and detailed installation instructions are provided with each VisiTank™ kit.

OEM has plans in the next few years to make VisiTank™ a platform for more monitoring functions. The modem can process signals from up to four sensors, and OEM is looking to incorporate sensors for room temperature and burner lockout as well as for propane tanks. Dealers will be able to add those capabilities as they become available without replacing any previously installed components.

For more information, visit [www.visitank.com](http://www.visitank.com) or call 203-736-8886.