BUTANE-PROPANE NEWS
BPN
MARCH 2023



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4 Avoidable Insurance Claims & 4 Solutions to Prevent Them

5 Steps to Crafting an **Employee Experience That Draws Top Talent**

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Dear Readers,

In February 2021, our company announced the acquisition of this brand, Butane-Propane News (here's to two great years in this industry!). The acquisition of this wonderful, decades-old magazine brought our publishing company to a total of four brands in four different industries. In 2022, we acquired two more brands: RV PRO and THE SHOP. For several years now, our parent company, Cahaba Media Group, has been one focused on sustainable, scalable growth. As a part of the management team, one of the biggest challenges we have grappled with time and again over the past few years has been how to continue to grow while still maintaining the strong culture we've had for years. Another challenge? How do we grow while continuing to take care of our employees? And still another? How do we grow as singular brands without losing sight of the most important facet of each one — you? There have been a lot of big wins and also some big learning opportunities to be had, as is the case with any journey.

Cahaba Media Group may be in a different industry than propane, but the challenges that persist for companies in both are similar: evolving and adapting with changing customer needs, growing despite economic fluctuations, finding and retaining the workforce that will help drive that growth, making sure your financial decisions are profitable ones, and above all, making sure the customer comes first. And although the global propane market is expected to see 4% growth over the next five years, this growth at a company level will only be possible with continued focus on the people, processes and strategy you have in place. In this issue, we've covered a few of these areas of the business and provided expert advice to boot:

- Page 22 — Tax considerations you should make throughout the year so the next tax season is a breeze
- Pages 35, 38 and 42 — A feature series that includes a look at European autogas growth and potential lessons for the domestic market as well as the answers you need to common questions from potential autogas customers
- Page 44 — Why increased sales starts with a proper plan and what it should include
- Page 53 — 4 common insurance claims and solutions to keep you from falling prey
- And much, much more!

Speaking of growth, we're excited to announce some upward momentum of our own. First, please join me in welcoming the newest member of our team, Johnny Nickel, joining us as associate editor of BPN. He'll be spending the next few months learning the ropes — both at BPN and in the propane industry. Come by and meet him in person (at Booth 418) at the National Propane Gas Association's Southeastern Convention and International Propane Expo next month. Secondly, while you're there, make sure to congratulate Managing Editor Jessica Graham on her recent promotion from associate editor to managing editor! You can reach us all at bpneditorial@cahabamedia.com.

Thanks for reading,



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BUTANE-PROPANE NEWS

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NPGA
NATIONAL PROPANE GAS ASSOCIATION

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March 2023



26



42



53



14

Feature Series: AUTOGAS

36 Autogas Lessons From Across the Pond
What the domestic market can learn from fuel sector growth in Europe

38 Answers to the Most Common Propane Autogas Questions
From expense & performance to fueling infrastructure & vehicle servicing, get the insight you need for potential autogas fleets

42 The Ever-Growing Case for Autogas
Increase your gallons with autogas & help fleets reduce fuel costs & move to true domestic security & sustainability

28 SPECIAL SECTION: Tank Monitors
Implementing a holistic remote tank monitoring strategyw



On the Cover
Autogas refueling infrastructure and remote tank monitoring tech (Image courtesy of Superior Energy Systems)

6 Marketplace

10 News & Events

14 Verbatim
Industry leaders answer: What Is the riskiest food you have ever eaten?

18 Propane & the Law
New York court limits propane propellant claim

22 Beyond the Mains
2023 tax tips for propane dealers

24 Finance
Navigating equipment finance: Part 2

26 Equipment
Creating power security in the wake of Hurricane Ian

44 Management
Set up your sales reps for success with comprehensive plans & meaningful goals

48 Marketing
Tips for building a robust marketing plan for 2023

50 Strategy
5 steps to crafting an employee experience that wins great talent

53 Insurance
4 avoidable insurance claims & 4 solutions to prevent them

56 Products

58 Advertiser Index

64 Industry Insider

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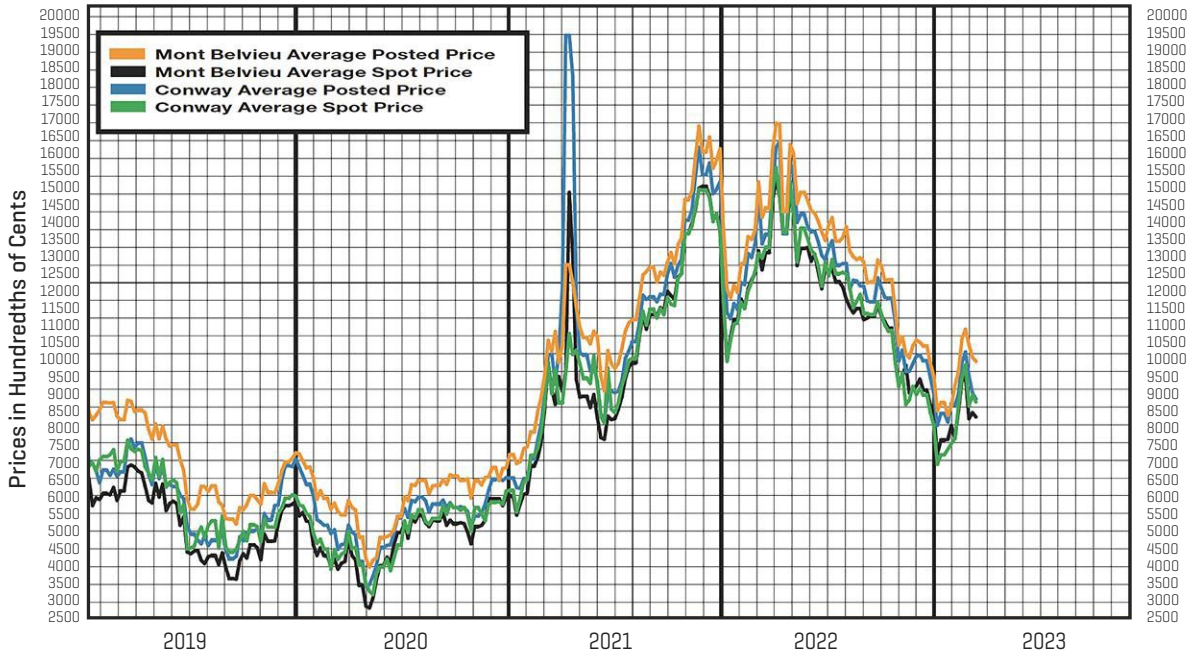
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Propane Education & Research Council

MONT BELVIEU & CONWAY AVERAGE THURSDAY PROPANE PRICES



at a glance During the latest January to February mid-month period, Mont Belvieu, Texas, posted prices dropped 6.417 cents/gal., and the spot prices decreased 6.875 cents. Conway, Kansas, postings ended with a 10.5-cent decrease and spots fell 10.25 cents over the month.

MID-WEEK AVERAGE POSTED/SPOT PROPANE PRICES (Cents per Gallon)

	1/19/23	1/26/23	2/2/23	2/9/23	2/16/23
Mont Belvieu					
posted	100.839	103.756	99.256	95.589	94.422
spot	89.500 – 91.250	93.375 – 93.875	81.500 – 82.000	84.625 – 85.750	82.625 – 83.250
Conway					
posted	93.948	97.098	90.148	85.248	83.448
spot	88.500 – 90.000	90.250 – 92.125	77.750 – 79.000	79.500 – 81.500	78.250 – 79.250

at a glance

Canada's primary underground propane inventories decreased by 30.22% in February, according to the Canada Energy Regulator. The total represented a month-to-month decrease of 460.8 Mcm. Compared to a year earlier, stocks were higher, with 6.2 Mcm, or 0.59%, more product on hand.

CANADIAN INVENTORIES (Thousand Cubic Meters)

PROPANE	Jan. 2023	Feb. 2023	Change	Feb. 2022
Propane-East	676.4	490.0	-27.6%	439.9
Propane-West	848.6	574.2	-32.3%	618.1
Total Propane	1525.0	1064.2	-30.2%	1058.0
BUTANE				
Butane-East	381.1	293.6	-23.0%	142.4
Butane-West	572.4	476.9	-16.7%	455.4
Total Butane	953.4	770.5	-19.2%	597.8

Source: Canada Energy Regulator

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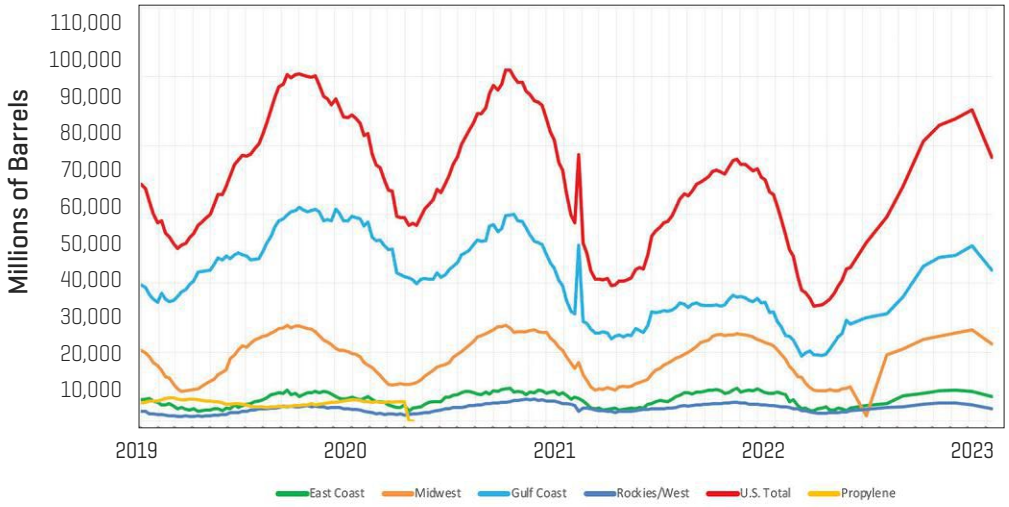
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U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES



at a glance

United States propane stocks experienced a 10.322-MMbbl decrease from January to February. East Coast stocks fell 1.548 MMbbl, the Midwest dropped 4.423 MMbbl, the Gulf Coast decreased 3.658 MMbbl, and the Rocky Mountain/West Coast decreased 657,000 bbl. Compared to the same time in February 2022, the February 2023 stocks were 24.394 MMbbl higher.

U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES

Jan. 13, 2023 - Feb. 10, 2023, and One Year Ago (Thousand Barrels)

	2/10/23	2/3/23	1/27/23	1/20/23	1/13/23	2/11/22
East Coast	5.475	5.388	6.443	7.102	7.023	4.500
Midwest	17.868	19.654	20.938	21.397	22.291	12.918
Gulf Coast	40.063	40.838	42.557	43.779	43.721	21.005
Rocky Mtn & West Coast	2.891	2.994	3.244	3.341	3.584	3.479
U.S.	66.297	68.874	73.181	75.618	76.619	41.903

U.S. RESIDENTIAL PROPANE PRICES

(Mid-Month, Cents per Gallon)

	Feb. 2023	Jan. 2023	Feb. 2022
East Coast (PADD 1)	341.0	337.9	352.2
Midwest (PADD 2)	229.7	229.3	246.7
Average U.S.	270.7	269.5	283.1

Source: "This Week in Petroleum," Energy Information Administration

Find out more:
For further commentary on mid-month prices and Canadian inventories, turn to page 10 or visit bpnews.com/news.

See you in Nashville at the Southeast Expo!

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HILTZ PROPANE SYSTEMS NAMES NEW PRESIDENT


Aaron Becker

Hiltz Propane Systems Inc. has announced the appointment of Aaron Becker to the position of president, effective Oct. 17, 2022. Matthew Hiltz, who has been acting as president and CEO, will continue as CEO. Becker joins the Hiltz team with more than 20 years of managerial experience, most recently working at Haller Enterprises, in which he acted as president during the last four years of his 15-year tenure with the company. Haller Enterprises is an industry leader in the mechanical and electrical trades in the Northeast region. As president, Becker was responsible for the oversight and direction of all sales and operational functions. Hiltz said, "[Aaron] is a seasoned leader with significant experience that will be a great asset as we continue growing. Building on our strong foundation — an industry leader in turnkey propane storage solutions and a culture of integrity — together we have a great opportunity to lead the industry with deep expertise and a continued commitment to service." In his new role, Becker joins the executive leadership team to develop and promote improved results for the day-to-day operations.

EIA LOWERS U.S. NATURAL GAS PRICE FORECAST AFTER A WARMER-THAN-AVERAGE START TO 2023

The United States Energy Information Administration (EIA) expects natural gas prices at the Henry Hub to average around $3.40 per million British thermal units in 2023, 47% lower than in 2022. According to EIA's February "Short-Term Energy Outlook" (STEO), a warmer-than-normal start to the year has reduced natural gas consumption to below average. "U.S. natural gas inventories fell by less than our expectations in January because of the warmer-than-average weather. With more natural gas in inventory, we reduced our forecast for natural gas prices over the coming year," said EIA Administrator Joe DeCarolis. "There is still a lot of uncertainty, including the possibility of extreme weather later this winter that could increase demand and temporarily slow down production, but those possibilities decrease as we approach spring." Increased natural gas production and less demand have allowed U.S. natural gas inventories to rise after a period of below-average levels. EIA expects natural gas inventories to remain above average through the summer.

THOMPSONGAS ACQUIRES GILBERT PROPANE INC.

ThompsonGas, headquartered in Frederick, Maryland, announced the acquisition of Gilbert Propane Inc., located in Deland, Florida. Founded nearly four decades ago by the late Drewy Gilbert and his wife Francis, Gilbert Propane Inc. has been an unwavering part of the Deland community. "We are very happy to welcome Gilbert Propane Inc. to our family of companies and look forward to continuing their tradition of exemplary customer service," said Area Director Todd Tanis. This acquisition further expands ThompsonGas' footprint in Florida and is ThompsonGas' first acquisition of 2023.

MID-MONTH TO MID-MONTH: MID-FEBRUARY POSTINGS DOWN FROM JANUARY

During the latest mid-month period, prices at Mont Belvieu, Texas, decreased as we hit the mid-winter. The posted prices decreased 6.417 cents/gal, from January mid-month to February mid-month while the spot prices decreased 6.875 cents. Postings at Conway, Kansas, ended with a 10.5-cent decrease and spots decreased 10.25 cents over the month. The Mont Belvieu mid-January posted price was 100.839 cents/gal. The next week the price increased by 2.917 cents to 103.756 cents, followed by a 4.5-cent decrease to 99.256 cents the first week of February. Prices then decreased 3.667 cents to land at 95.589 the next week. At mid-month, postings decreased 1.167 cents to land at 94.422 cents/gal. Compared to the same time in February 2022, the February 2023 prices were 44.5 cents lower. The Conway mid-January posted price was 93.948 cents/gal. The next week the price increased by 3.15 cents to 97.098 cents, followed by a 6.95-cent decrease to 90.148 cents the first week of February. Prices then decreased 4.9 cents to land at 85.248 the next week. At mid-month, postings decreased 1.8 cents to land at 83.448 cents/gal. Compared to the same time in February 2022, the February 2023 prices were 47.8 cents lower. Mont Belvieu spot prices opened the mid-January period at 89.500 cents/gal. The next week the price rose by 3.875 cents to 93.375 cents, followed by a 11.875-cent decrease to 81.500 cents the first week of February. Prices then increased 3.125 cents to land at 84.625 the next week. At mid-month, they fell 2 cents to land at 82.625 cents/gal. Compared to the same time in February 2022, the February 2023 prices were 44.875 cents lower. Conway spot prices opened the mid-January period at 88.500 cents/gal. The next week the price rose 1.75 cents to 90.250 cents, followed by a 12.5-cent decrease to 77.750 cents the first week of February. Prices then increased 1.75 cents to land at 79.500 the next week. At mid-month, they fell 1.25 cents to land at 78.250 cents/gal. Compared to the same time in February 2022, the February 2023 prices were 47.75 cents lower.

P3 PROPANE SAFETY WELCOMES NEW SAFETY CONSULTANT


John Horner

P3 Propane Safety announced that John Horner has joined the Safety Services Team as a senior consultant of training and safety. Horner is currently based in Texas, and he will assist new and existing clients with the implementation of the P3 Compliance System. In addition to local training approved by the Texas Railroad Commission, he will also provide CETP, DOT and HAZMAT training across the region. Horner will help marketers fulfill their regulatory compliance requirements by developing policies and procedures, DOT security plans, operations and

maintenance manuals, and fire safety analyses. Horner was the former director of safety compliance and training for Meritum Energy Holdings and has also worked at propane companies spanning the south-central U.S. and the East Coast, such as Pico Propane and Fuels and Ferrellgas.

ONE-TANK HIRES BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER


Danny Leverette

One-Tank has welcomed Danny Leverette as a new addition to the team. Leverette will help the company form strategic partnerships as the business development manager. He brings years of experience to assist One-Tank's continued growth. Public service has been at the heart of Leverette's entire life and career. He was elected mayor of his hometown of Spring Hill, Tennessee, and served on the Spring Hill City Council and the city's planning commission. As mayor, he worked with TriStar, a division of Hospital Corporation (HCA), to build a hospital in Spring Hill. He also worked with Tre Hargett, Tennessee secretary of state, who was employed by Rural/Metro, an emergency services provider, as vice president for the southern region. He was able to establish emergency medical services for Spring Hill. As mayor, he also worked with George B. Tomlin of GBT to build the largest retail development in the city. Leverette is a veteran of the U.S. Navy and he also worked for the U.S. Post Office, where he retired in 2019 after 28 years.

MIDWEST PROPANE INDUSTRY SHARES PERSPECTIVES & INNOVATIONS AT SUMMIT

Midwest industry leaders gathered in January for a Midwest Propane Summit, held at Big Cedar Lodge in Ridgedale, Missouri. The event brought together more than 30 representatives from state associations, propane marketers and industry suppliers. The attendees came from Arkansas, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma to discuss opportunities, challenges and best practices. Tucker Perkins, president and CEO of PERC, and Stuart Weidie, PERC chairman, joined as participants. The objectives for the two-day summit were to increase communication between the states, share best practices and identify opportunities for cooperation. Participants spent a considerable amount of time discussing how to succeed with propane autogas fleets. That focus was fueled by a presentation from Big Cedar's Safety and Logistics Coordinator Liz Stanley, who is supervising the conversion of the property's shuttles to propane. The property intends to add more propane vehicles, including maintenance and laundry trucks, landscape equipment and more. Additional discussions on best practices for school bus events led to at least one new event planned for Oklahoma with a series of two to five more planned for Arkansas and Missouri. One of the key topics was how to achieve consistent regulatory compliance across state lines. The group will convene again during the Mid-States Propane Expo, Aug. 7-9, in Rogers, Arkansas.



The European Automobile Manufacturers' Association (ACEA) reported that the EU saw 53.1% of its car market go to alternatively-powered vehicles in the last quarter of 2022 — including LPG-fueled vehicles, which grew by 16.7%.

53.1%

CANADIAN PROPANE INVENTORIES DECREASE FROM JANUARY TO FEBRUARY

Canada's primary underground propane inventories decreased by 30.22% in February, according to the Canada Energy Regulator. The total, 1064.2 Mcm, represented a month-to-month decrease of 460.8 Mcm. Compared to a year earlier, stocks were higher, with 6.2 Mcm, or 0.59%, more product on hand. Propane storages in the West started February a bit lower at 574.2 Mcm, which corresponds to 3.617 MMbbl, the agency reported. From January to February, volumes decreased by 274.4 Mcm, or 32.34%, and were 43.9 less the year prior's level of 618.1 Mcm. Propane storages in the East started February lower at 490 Mcm, commensurate with 3.087 MMbbl. This loss put propane 186.4 Mcm, or 27.56%, lower for the month, with an increase of 50.1, or 11.39% above a year earlier. Canadian butane inventories stood at 770.5 Mcm at the beginning of February, for a decrease of 182.9 Mcm, or 19.18%, from January. Like propane, the year-over-year comparison finds butane volumes to be higher than the prior year's total, with inventories 172.7 Mcm, or 28.89%, above 2022. Western butane supplies, at 476.9 Mcm, were lower by 95.5 Mcm, or 16.68%, from the previous month and were 21.5 Mcm, or 4.72%, more than last year. Eastern butane, at 293.6 Mcm, was 87.5 Mcm, or -22.96%, lower month over month, and totaled 151.2 Mcm, or 106.18%, above a year earlier.

PERC ANNOUNCES 2023 PROPANE FARM INCENTIVE PROGRAM & NEW ONLINE APPLICATION PROCESS

The Propane Education & Research Council announces its 2023 Propane Farm Incentive Program, which provides financial incentives of up to $5,000 toward the purchase of qualifying propane equipment — including irrigation engines, power generators, agricultural building and water heating systems, and flame weed control systems. The Propane Farm Incentive Program is a nationwide research and demonstration initiative that offers financial incentives toward the purchase of new propane equipment in exchange for providing operation and propane usage feedback. To make the application process easier than ever, PERC has created a new online platform with all materials necessary for program qualification and participation. To apply,

producers can simply visit propane.com/farmincentive and complete the step-by-step process to receive incentives toward qualifying equipment. "This program provides an excellent opportunity to directly help producers interested in upgrading farm equipment to new propane-powered systems, while gathering invaluable feedback directly from farmers to continue improving propane equipment," said Michael Newland, director of agriculture business development at PERC.

LAKES GAS ACQUIRES VAN'S GAS SERVICE

Lakes Gas, headquartered in Wyoming, Minnesota, announced it has acquired the propane operations of Van's Gas Service, in Kenosha, Wisconsin. This transaction is Lakes Gas' first acquisition of 2023. Van's Gas Service was founded in 1943 by the grandfather of Scott Van Thiel. The company sells and delivers propane to residential and commercial customers of Kenosha and Racine counties in the southeast corner of Wisconsin. "We are pleased to add to our market strength in southern Wisconsin," Lakes Gas CEO Trent Hampton said. "Van's Gas customers can expect us to continue to provide outstanding customer service and to remain involved in the local communities. In addition, they will have greater access to more purchasing programs and online services."

RAY MURRAY INC. WELCOMES NEW TECHNICAL SUPPORT REPRESENTATIVE


Eben Waugh

Ray Murray Inc. (RMI) has announced the addition of Eben Waugh to its technical support team. Waugh brings over 25 years of experience in the propane, hearth and heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) industries. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in business administration and management and is a Penquis Leadership Institute graduate. Waugh has prior experience as a CETP Trainer, proctor and skill evaluator. Throughout his career, he has provided management, installation and service and delivery for major propane marketers. "Welcoming Eben to our team was an easy decision, given his extensive experience and vast industry knowledge. We know he will provide the outstanding technical support and training that our customers are accustomed to," said Mike Hopsicker, RMI president and CEO.

CHS TO BUILD NEW GRAIN SHUTTLE FACILITY IN SOUTHEAST SOUTH DAKOTA

CHS Inc. will begin construction this spring on a new grain shuttle facility in southeast South Dakota, a strategic location in its Pacific Northwest corridor. The new facility will include new technology and the safety features in the new 1.1-million-bushel grain facility. It will be built near the intersection of Interstate 29 and State Highway 44 in southeast South Dakota and tie into an existing rail loop currently used for CHS agronomy operations. The facility will feature fast and efficient receiving and loadout capabilities to bring area farmers even more market access in the Pacific Northwest grain corridor and other important markets. The facility will create a safer environment for employees, farmers and community members through cleaner operating conditions and updated equipment with enhanced safety features.

Industry Calendar

March 14-15 Propane Marketers of Kansas Board & Committee Meetings
pmak.org
Topeka, KS

March 15 Louisiana PGA Board Meeting
npga.org
Alexandria, LA

March 15 Tennessee PGA Board & Membership Meeting
tennpropane.com
TBD (at press time)

March 15-16 Colorado PGA Board Meeting
npga.org
Greeley, CO

March 15-16 Rocky Mt. PGA Spring Conference
rmpropane.org
Jackson, WY

March 20-21 Mid-Atlantic PGA Board & Membership Meeting
mapga.org
Dover, DE

March 20-23 Minnesota Annual Meeting
discoverpropanemn.com
Bloomington, MN

March 23 Nebraska Board Meeting & Legislative Day
nebraskapropane.com
Lincoln, NE

March 27 Florida PGA Spring Meeting
fpga.net
Crystal River, FL

March 28-29 New York PGA Spring Conference
nypropane.com
Albany, NY

March 28-29 PERC Leadership in Energy Ambassadors Conference
propane.com
Sarasota, FL

May 21-24 Eastern Energy Expo
easternenergyexpo.com
Atlantic City, NJ

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Nancy Coop is an industry advocate. She is director of marketing at the M&A advisory firm Cetane Associates. Contact her at ncoop@cetane.net. Visit cetane.net.

WHAT IS THE RISKIEST FOOD YOU HAVE EVER EATEN?

Unusual, dangerous or bad for you — your propane colleagues share their most daring food choices

Some found this question challenging yet scoured their memories for stories to share. Enjoy the read — there is risky food in all corners of the globe.

In this column, adopted from the familiar "Heard on the Street" format, we offer our responders a chance to answer the question posed in the title. These are their replies reported verbatim.

WE DARE!

Goat. My in-laws hosted our wedding reception and they served goat head. While it is not dangerous or bad for me, it was unusual.

JULIE JOHNSON
TED JOHNSON PROPANE
BALDWIN PARK, CALIFORNIA

In most countries around the world, eggs are not refrigerated. The FDA requires eggs to be refrigerated in the United States due to the washing process that weakens the shell. While walking on the dirt streets of Isla Mujeres in Mexico, we stumbled across stacks of fresh eggs sitting out in the open. Very American and surprised to see eggs out of the fridge, we decided to purchase a couple dozen to cook breakfast for the house the following morning. After some liquid courage later that evening, I was convinced to crack open one of the raw street eggs and slurp it down. That was one of the riskiest foods I have ever eaten.

BARRETT CONWAY
CETANE ASSOCIATES
WASHINGTON, D.C.

When I was newly walking, my mom documented in my baby book, "Lauren ate cat food yesterday … and again today." This must be the most unusual thing I have ever eaten.

LAUREN CLARK
BERGQUIST
TOLEDO, OHIO

Many years ago, I cooked some chicken for my wife, Karen, and myself, but apparently not well enough. Unfortunately, she wound up in bed for the remainder of that evening and part of the following day. She did basically all the cooking in our house, and since I was not feeling any ill effects myself, I was suspected of having nefarious intent when I offered to cook for her that day. So, the next meal she cooked for us was certainly the riskiest meal I've ever eaten.

BRUCE SWIECICKI
NATIONAL PROPANE GAS ASSOCIATION
TINLEY PARK, ILLINOIS

When I was 15, I went to an evening open house at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) with my best friend, Janice. One of the exhibits had a large gathering of people huddled around and the sound of laughter as well as groans caught our attention. Pushing our way to the front, we found a large glass bowl filled with … bugs. And we learned that if we ate a bug, we could get a pin saying, "I ate a bug at the ROM." That sounded like a good deal to us, so we did!

LESLIE WOODWARD
FAIRVIEW FITTINGS
OAKVILLE, ONTARIO, CANADA

About 40 years ago, we noticed an appetizer on a restaurant menu called calamari. We had never heard of it before and asked the waitress what it was. Rather than tell us it was squid,



she asked if we were feeling adventurous. We decided to give it a try and thought it was good! Since that time, we have found there is a lot of seafood out there besides fish sticks and enjoy trying a variety of new foods!

ROSIE BUSCHUR
MCMAHAN'S BOTTLE GAS
DAYTON, OHIO

I remember one of the most miserable experiences of my entire life that happened in the late 1990s. One afternoon, I went out with an account manager and his customer to the Anchor Bar Restaurant in Buffalo, New York, to try their "Best Wings in the World." Not knowing much about sauces, I left it to the locals to select.

After trying several different kinds, I chose to dip my chicken wing in a sauce called "Suicidal." My initial reaction was, "Oh my God." I swallowed actual flames, it was so hot. Yes, I had tried the most extreme heat sauce available. I broke into immediate sweats, started gagging and witnessed a level of discomfort I still cannot accurately describe today. I sprinted to the bathroom and immediately tried flushing my mouth with cold water for at least 10 minutes. When I came out, I was given an obligatory T-shirt by the owner, and the whole restaurant was laughing.

I guess that could qualify as unusual, risky or dangerous, but in retrospect, it was stupid. A valuable lesson was learned for sure.

JERRY SCHIMMEL
P3 PROPANE SAFETY
CUMBERLAND, RHODE ISLAND

In my travels over the years, I have tried many different foods. One of the more memorable moments was when I visited a restaurant in New Orleans that my nephew, Nate, opened for Aaron Sanchez and John Besh called Johnny Sanchez. I was treated to new items on the menu that included roasted crickets. I was apprehensive but they tasted great!

Another time, I visited my daughter in Seoul, South Korea. We had some raw fish and live shrimp and sea urchin. I had kimchi and soup with unknown seafood. Again, it tasted awesome.

However, the most disgusting thing I have ever eaten was scrapple in Pennsylvania. I think it was made from all the scraps of meat, bones and skin from whatever was butchered that day. Always willing to try things once. Some I will never try again!

ED VARNEY
TOP LINE MANAGEMENT LLC
MCKINNEY, TEXAS

DARE YOU?

This month's question for me was a tie. With all the traveling that we do, I have come across some … let's call them interesting food choices. The two riskiest choices that I've made were these. First off was coffee at a Pennsylvania rest area. That stuff was so horrible, I believe it was sitting in the machine for years. The second food item was a hamburger at a little mom and pop gas station in West Virginia. It seemed risky, but I was hungry. Turns out, it was actually one of the better burgers I've ever had.

JON SHEPARD
VK INSPECTIONS LLC
MERCER, PENNSYLVANIA

In the Marine Corps, I ate sea rations (now replaced by MREs) from time to

time depending on what sort of duty I had at the time. They were never good, maybe unusual, but not dangerous or necessarily bad for you. I might be bit of a picky eater, so anything unusual or dangerous is out of the question to start with for me.

I do, however, seem to like a lot of things that are bad for me, like pizza, hamburgers, French fries and caffeine. Thankfully, I never have had a sweet tooth!

BOYD H. MCGATHEY
ENERGY DISTRIBUTION PARTNERS
PARKVILLE, MISSOURI

I will tell you I am not a risk taker or adventurous when it comes to food, but being a severe "carb-aholic," I seem to lose any sense of control when it comes to bread and pasta, thereby causing a gluttonous dining experience.

JUDY TARANOVICH
PROCTOR GAS
PROCTOR, VERMONT

I will admit that I'm not the most daring person in the food category! My rule is that I will try a bite of anything once. My family loves sushi rolls, and I just can't manage to get those down, so you now see where my limits are. One of my favorite tours to book when I'm in a new area is a local food tour! This allows me to learn a little history about the area and try new dishes.

TONYA CROW
GROWMARK INC.
BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS

I'll eat just about anything that's offered up. If there is something on the menu that I've never had before, then it's likely that I'm going to order it. I haven't had one specific meal that was really bad for me, but there is one thing that is really bad for me, and unfortunately, I eat it almost every day. I'm addicted to it like many other Americans: sugar. I am a former smoker, and I honestly believe that it was easier to quit smoking than it is to give up sugar. Sometimes I can go for a week or two without it, but sooner or later the cravings always get the better of me.

JASON SOULON
WESTMOR INDUSTRIES
SHAWNEE, KANSAS

I absolutely love Twizzlers. I think it's fair to say that they fall under all three categories of being unusual, dangerous and bad for me. They are full of corn syrup and Red Dye 40; however, I cannot watch a movie in a theatre without them!

JESSICA JOHNSON
THOMPSONGAS
ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

RISK-WORTHY?

Is there a lesson in here or just the fun of sharing oddball food adventures? For this month's column, let's roll with the entertainment aspect. May your next meal be delicious, safely prepared and not wind up in a future issue of BPN.

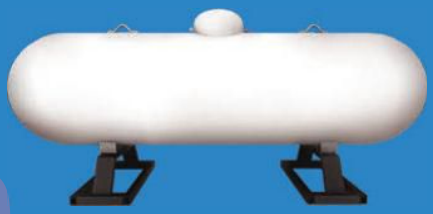


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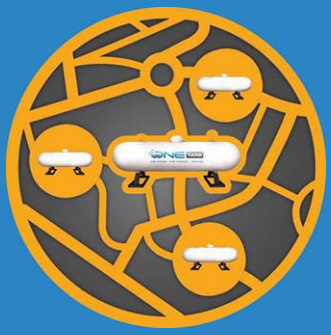




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David Schlee is of counsel to The McCarthy Law Firm P.C. He may be reached at david@mokpclaw.com.

NEW YORK COURT LIMITS PROPANE PROPELLANT CLAIM

Court says plaintiff can present a claim on an explosion suit to a jury, but will be limited to circumstantial evidence

Propane has many uses. As most readers are aware, one of those uses is as a propellant in various canned spray products. In a recent decision, a federal court in New York considered, and significantly limited, the claim of a woman who sought recovery for serious injuries when a can of cooking spray containing propane propellant allegedly exploded. The case is Bozick v. Conagra Foods Inc.

COOKING A STEAK

On Sept. 11, 2018, Grace Bozick was alone in her apartment. Around 7:30 in the evening, she decided to cook a steak for dinner. At first, all went well. She sprayed her frying pan with PAM cooking spray (manufactured by ConAgra Foods), put the steak in the pan and started to cook it at the high setting on the left front burner of her stove. She set the cannister of PAM spray on the counter about 7 inches from the edge of the stove and about 13 inches from the center of the burner.

The PAM cooking spray cannister included the following warning and caution statements:

- "Can may burst if left on stove or near heat source"
- "Contents under pressure"
- "Do not store above 120 degrees Fahrenheit"
- "Store at room temperature"
- "Flammable"

Bozick cooked the steak for about 6 to 8 minutes and then turned the burner off. She then filled the pan with water and soap, put it back on the left front burner and turned the burner on to the low setting. She left the kitchen, ate her steak and returned after about five minutes.

'EXPLOSION'

Bozick later testified that when she returned to the kitchen, there was an "explosion," and she saw flames coming from the PAM cannister. She was injured and immediately pressed a button outside the door of her apartment, calling the doorman.

The doorman arrived, and while he remained in the apartment, she took a taxi to the hospital, as she thought it would be faster than an ambulance. In the meantime, the doorman cleaned the kitchen, and no photographs were taken of the scene of the incident before the cleaning was done.

DIFFERING ACCOUNTS

Bozick said that before she left for the hospital, she called her brother and told him that she had been injured by an exploding can of PAM cooking spray. Her brother later corroborated this. However, there was some question as to whether Bozick's injuries were caused by an exploding cooking spray can. When she arrived at the hospital, she was interviewed by hospital personnel about how the accident happened. The intake notes state:

- *"Patient was cooking dinner in the oven around 7 p.m. on 9/11, and while she opened the stove, it blew up."*
- *"She is unsure if water from the pot burned her or if her hand caught fire."*
- *"She reported that hot grease spilled onto her right hand and wrist. Also splashed on her right cheek."*
- *"Patient is uncertain if her hand caught fire or if the burn is from water in a pot; she was soaking on the stove in an attempt to clean it."*

Bozick later disputed the accuracy of these notes, claiming she never made the quoted statements and that she was in shock and on painkillers when



the statements allegedly were made. However, they will clearly present a problem for her at trial. Defense trial lawyers always review emergency room intake documents very carefully for the injured person's descriptions of the incident, which are often the most truthful accounts.

DESIGN & MANUFACTURING DEFECTS

Bozick sued ConAgra. She claimed that the PAM cooking spray cannister was defective and that its rupture resulted in the alleged explosion that caused her injuries. Specifically, she argued that the cannister was defectively designed in a way that made it susceptible to rupture and explosion, and that there was a manufacturing defect that resulted in the rupture and explosion in Bozick's apartment. She also asserted that the warnings on the cannister were inadequate. ConAgra filed a motion for summary judgment, seeking a dismissal of the lawsuit.

In its ruling, the court first addressed the design defect claim. The plaintiff made two arguments on this point. First, she argued the cannister was required to withstand an internal pressure buildup of up to 180 psi. However, her experts contended that ConAgra specified only the thickness for the raw steel that was used in the manufacture of the cannister. It did not specify how thick the steel should be after the manufacturing process was complete. This, the experts contended, allowed the walls of the cannister to be thinner and made the cannister susceptible to failure at an internal pressure buildup of less than 180 psi. The court found insufficient evidence to support this claim:

"Plaintiff, however, fails to provide sufficient evidence from which a reasonable jury could find that Defendants' cans, as a result of the failure to provide specifications for the post-manufacturing thickness of the bottom of the cans, are not designed to reliably ensure a minimum buckle pressure of 180 psi."

BLCBE

Bozick next argued that the event in her kitchen was a Boiling Liquid Collapsed Bubble Explosion (BLCBE). This is similar — on a much smaller scale — to what those in the propane industry know as a Boiling Liquid Evaporating Vapor Explosion, or BLEVE, which is the catastrophic high-pressure rupture of a propane tank or cylinder. Here, Bozick's experts argued that the cannister and the cooking spray were defectively designed because the mixture of cooking oil and propane propellant made the cannister susceptible to a BLCBE event when the contents are shaken and sprayed in a kitchen environment. The court rejected this claim as speculative. Among other things, the court addressed multiple problems in the analysis conducted by one of plaintiff's experts, Mr. Eagar:

"In addition, even assuming that the 'process of spraying product from the container sets up the potential for BLCBE,' Eagar does not explain why the can did not explode until approximately fifteen minutes after Plaintiff sprayed it. Eagar also implies that a key trigger of the BLCBE is shaking the can; however, when asked at his deposition whether Plaintiff shook the can before using it, Eagar stated that he did not 'remember [her] testifying to it.'"

The court then turned to the manufacturing defect claim. In this

claim, Bozick argued that even if the cannister was properly designed, it failed on the day of the incident because of a specific manufacturing error in the fabrication of this one cannister. The court noted that no evidence was presented of any specific manufacturing defect in Bozick's cannister.

However, it held that under New York law she could still argue, based on circumstantial evidence, that there must have been a manufacturing defect in the cannister for it to explode under the circumstances that she described.

WARNINGS

Finally, the court addressed the failure to warn claim. It rejected this claim because the plaintiff had presented no evidence that ConAgra knew that the cannister could explode under the circumstances she described:

"Without evidence of Defendants' knowledge or reason to know of the possibility of an explosion from the circumstances Plaintiff describes, Plaintiff cannot claim that Defendants should have warned consumers of such dangers."

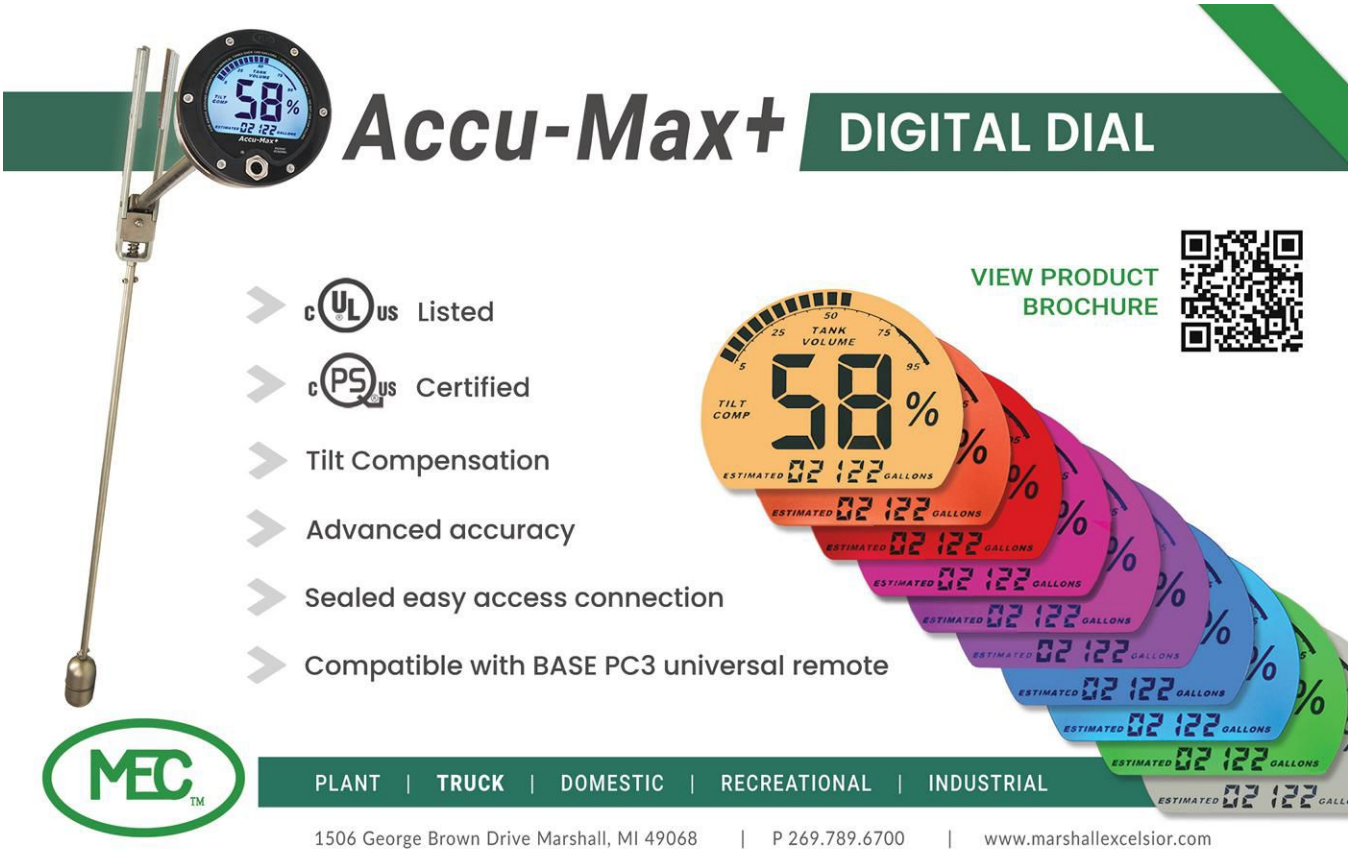
In addition, the court found no evidence that a different warning on the cannister would have prevented Bozick's injuries:

"Specifically, there is no evidence that Plaintiff would not have purchased the product if given any of these proposed warnings, that she misunderstood the risks as a result of Defendants' failure to give them, or that Plaintiff would have used the product any differently had Defendants given a different warning."

The net result of the ruling is that Bozick's claim against ConAgra survives and can be presented to a jury. However, it has now been significantly limited. She can no longer argue that the cannister was defectively designed or that its warnings were inadequate. She can attempt to convince a jury that the cannister she bought was defectively manufactured, but she can only do this with circumstantial evidence.

> Bozick's claim against ConAgra survives ... now significantly limited.

While this case is interesting, it is highly unlikely that the use of propane as a propellant in cooking spray and other similar cannisters presents a significant liability risk for propane distributors. There was no such claim asserted in this case, and I am not aware of any such claim having been made in my 37 years of representing propane distributors. As is apparent, the attack here is on the cannister and not on the propane inside the cannister.







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2023 TAX TIPS FOR PROPANE DEALERS

Maximize savings & remain compliant with this breakdown of how to approach your taxes throughout the year

By now, you should have submitted your 2022 tax year documents for preparation and filing (and your tax accountant has already asked for an extension until October, a widespread practice across many industries). But taxes cannot be a part-time focus for you. The time to prepare for next year's taxes is right now. Here are several steps you can take during the remainder of 2023 to make sure you maximize tax savings while remaining in compliance with tax laws and regulations.

- The most important action you can take is to meet with your tax advisor to review your 2023 budget. They will be able to identify and suggest ways to make your business more tax efficient.
- Review your company's entity type and determine whether a change of entity would be beneficial in light of recent tax changes.
- Conduct a review of employee benefits. Are there additional benefits you can offer to make your company a more attractive employer while also reaping tax advantages? One option that could be beneficial — and would be welcome considering the current inflationary conditions — is a one-time profit share for all employees to help reduce tax obligation.
- Review your capital assets budget for



2023 to discuss how to gain the most depreciation. Plan purchases with tax consequences in mind so that you can make the best choice between depreciation and expensing.

- You can use IRS Section 179 to fully expense equipment purchases (up to a certain limit). In 2022, the Section 179 limits are $1.08 million, and the full deduction can be taken unless equipment purchases are greater than $2.7 million for the tax year in which the deduction is being claimed. If the purchases exceed $2.7 million, the deduction reduces dollar-for-dollar. For the 2023 tax year, those limits increase to $1.16 million and $2.89 million.
- Many propane companies have taken advantage of bonus depreciation over the past several years to expense equipment purchases 100% during the year they were made. Starting in 2023, the bonus depreciation will be phased out, and only 80% of the purchase cost can be expensed, while the remaining 20% must be amortized.
- Take advantage of available tax credits. The research and development (R&D) tax credit has been eliminated (maybe!), but others are out there. If you have not taken an Employee Retention Credit for 2020 and the first two quarters of 2021, there is still time to determine eligibility and apply for credits of up to $26,000 per employee.
- Keep more accurate records. Upgrade your accounting and financial management software so that you can streamline data entry and gain access to more accurate information on a timely basis.
- Look for opportunities to make a corporate charitable donation. This might not only help lessen your tax burden but would raise your profile and burnish your image in the community.
- Maximize your personal retirement contributions. If you are self-employed and have a Keogh plan, you can contribute up to $61,000 in pre-tax income. For Roth IRAs and traditional IRAs, the 2023 contribution limit has been raised to $6,500 (up from $6,000).
- Write down bad debts and old inventory. Bad debts that are likely to be uncollectible can be written off using a direct write-off method or provision method. An inventory write-down reduces the book value of inventory to improve the income statement and balance sheet of a business.

Taxes are a fact of life when running a business. But being strategic about planning purchases & alert to ways of reducing your tax obligation can lead to paying less money to the government & keeping more for your business.

Taxes are a fact of life when running a business. But being strategic about planning purchases and alert to ways of reducing your tax obligation can lead to paying less money to the government and keeping more for your business.



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NAVIGATING EQUIPMENT FINANCE: PART 2

Tips & strategies for the financing approval process

BY PAULA SUMMERS

In the January 2023 issue of BPN, we illustrated different equipment finance solutions. We discussed how equipment financing is an important tool to utilize when operating a business, because it allows business owners added flexibility to acquire the most updated equipment and technology.

By utilizing financing as a procurement tool, propane businesses can preserve cash, which can be utilized in times of emergency for unexpected expenses or decreases in revenue. From a borrowing perspective, preserving cash demonstrates to lenders that you have stability and operational efficiency.

Vision Financial Group (VFG) Leasing & Finance has worked with a variety of different propane marketers since 1999, ranging from smaller companies to multistate organizations. Each individual company has very specific tax, cash flow and accounting needs that are specific to their business. Depending on the cost and type of equipment you are acquiring, the finance approval process can vary.

There is a saying that "he or she who has the gold makes the rules." It is important for propane companies to understand what institutions are looking for when ascertaining their credit-worthiness for not only credit approval, but also for competitive rates and terms. A good lender should:

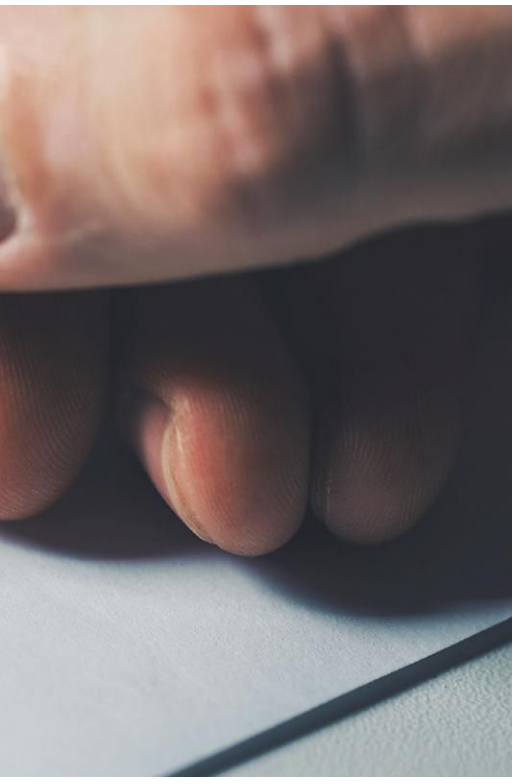
- Understand your business
- Provide flexibility to meet your cash flow needs

SUMMERTIME BLUES

Most propane companies experience higher revenues during the colder months. Ask your lender if they can offer flexible payment structures with lower payments in the summer and higher payments in the winter to match your cash flow.

DON'T HAVE ALL YOUR EGGS IN ONE BASKET

The banking relationship is important when running a business, and your bank will likely also offer financing for equipment loans. Keep in mind that while your bank is a great partner, your banker may not always have the best structure to offer on equipment loans and leases. All lenders will have some exposure and concentration limits. It is important to have more than one



lender who understands your business. An additional lender may have less restrictive finance structures available, including 100% financing, variable maturities and be willing to finance assets that are unfamiliar to the bank, such as propane tanks, tank monitors and autogas conversions.

A BOBTAIL IS NOT A HOUSE

When comparing interest rates for equipment, be aware that equipment finance rates are typically higher than real estate transactions.

SPEAKING OF BOBTAILS ...

Keep in mind that with specialized assets, there is often a higher interest rate. New vehicles, such as service vans and work trucks, will have relatively low interest rates, as these are assets that can be used in any industry. Specialty equipment like bobtails and transport trailers will be slightly higher. Bulk storage facilities and fueling stations may also warrant a rate increase as these are fixed assets. Propane tanks and tank monitors are also specialty items because these can be considered inventory since they will be located at various customer locations throughout a service area.

LET'S TALK ABOUT LIENS

A blanket lien is a lien in which a lender has the right to claim multiple assets — often all of a business's assets — that were used as collateral for a loan. Blanket liens include the risk of a business losing its assets in the event it cannot repay an obligation to the entity filing the lien.

A uniform commercial code (UCC) lien filing is a legal form that a lender files to give notice that it has an interest in the business property of a borrower. Essentially, UCC lien filings allow a lender to secure their financing. UCC liens are typically only filed on the assets that are being financed. It is important to clarify with your lender which type of lien they will be filing.

TO PG OR NOT TO PG

Typically, closely held businesses will be required to provide a personal guarantee (PG). Some lenders may be willing to forgo a personal guarantee if the business is particularly strong or has a long time in business. You can also negotiate eliminating a PG, but be prepared that the terms may change by paying a larger down payment or a higher interest rate. Terms reflect how much risk the lender is willing to take on any given transaction.

Does a PG affect your personal credit? No. A PG does not need to be shown on your personal financial statement, nor does it affect your personal credit score. It is simply a guarantee that if the business files bankruptcy, you will personally agree to pay off the obligation. This illustrates to the lender that not only are you asking them to stand behind your business, but you will as well. A personal guarantee shows a sense of pride of ownership.

APPLICATION-ONLY VS. FULL FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

If you have at least five years in business and ample borrowing history, transactions from third-party lenders can often be approved on a credit application-only basis typically for transactions under $300,000. Keep in mind that you may be able to negotiate better terms by providing full financials. Full financial disclosure is required for larger amounts and shorter time in business.

> A good lender should understand your business & provide flexibility to meet your cash flow needs.

Borrowing history is typically reported by your lender. Make sure your lender is reporting your borrowing history so you can build business credit.

If you are starting a new business, lenders will want to see industry experience and good personal credit. Be prepared to share your personal tax returns, a personal financial statement and a business plan.

The bottom line: Remember that you are the customer and always have the power of choice and negotiation.

Paula Summers is director of strategic partnerships at VFG. She is a graduate of the Georgia Institute of Technology, a National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) member, a Southeast Propane Alliance member, Certified Lease Finance Professional and the incoming 2023 chair of the NPGA Women in Propane Council. Contact her at 843-200-9470 or paula@vfgusa.com. VFG is a wholly owned subsidiary of Civista Bank, a $3.5 billion bank based in Sandusky, Ohio. VFG was started in 1991 and has been proudly providing capital equipment financing solutions to the propane industry since 1999. Visit vfgusa.com.





CREATING POWER SECURITY IN THE WAKE OF HURRICANE IAN

One example of emergency response from the propane industry protects communities from prolonged loss of power

BY SAM FOOS

The home is a sanctuary. In an increasingly electrified world, people rely on electricity for nearly every facet of their lives, making it critical to keep the home's power on.

Home standby and portable generators are among the easiest and most cost-effective ways to help ensure the power stays on when the electrical grid goes down. But after the storm, customers might need support to help guarantee their backup power products can keep their homes and their families safe.

Hurricane Ian made landfall in southwest Florida as a Category 4 hurricane on Sept. 28, 2022, causing widespread flooding and property damage. The storm left millions without power, with more than 2.4 million Floridians alone left in the dark according to Generac's Power Outage Central, an online tool that compiles outage data into an interactive map of the United States.

The company's Hurricane Response Team departed for the Gulf Coast on Sept. 28, just hours before Hurricane Ian made landfall in Florida. The team was equipped and loaded with four vehicles and a trailer full of equipment, tools and parts to service all brands of generators and armed with necessities such as first-aid kits, coolers, road flares and fire extinguishers.

"Generac's Hurricane Response Team is composed of volunteers, technicians and maintenance and service experts who willingly leave their families to help strangers when they need it most. The team is on the road for weeks at a time,



often in uncomfortable situations," said Marshall Lewis, international technical senior service manager at Generac. "It's really an organic effort by employees who want to help people in need, and it makes me proud to lead a company with such generous teammates."

After establishing a strategic base in southern Georgia, the team traveled into the hardest-hit parts of Florida, repairing any brand of portable generators and residential home standby generators, as well as industrial generators for data centers, hospitals and wastewater treatment plants free of charge.

The Hurricane Response program is not new. Since the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, volunteers have deployed to areas affected by major power outages. In the years since, crews have been sent to provide immediate support following dozens of natural disasters. And, as is common during major outage events, the Generac customer care center also receives a barrage of inbound calls ranging from simple questions about maintenance to in-depth troubleshooting.

Prepared for these situations when outages are extensive, the customer care representatives work around the clock to advise and answer as many technical questions as can be managed over the phone.

When disasters take down the power people rely on, it's important to jump into action — often with boots on the ground — to help ensure communities have the technical support they may need to keep their homes and families safe.

Sam Foos is senior director of technical service at Generac Power Systems. Visit generac.com.



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IMPLEMENTING A HOLISTIC TANK MONITORING STRATEGY

Experts chime in on how marketers can improve business practices through tank monitoring

BY BPN STAFF



ANOVA

What does your company's tank monitoring strategy look like? Is it all-encompassing and operating smoothly or more on the side of nonexistent? Wherever you are in the process of implementing and investing in this tank technology, it's likely you have questions.

As you're evaluating whether your company's strategy is in need of improvement, make sure to consider it with a holistic view in mind. Otodata President Andre Boulay notes the recent technology survey released by Cargas. "The fuel delivery industry is prioritizing the customer experience as a means of retention, with almost 90% of respondents selecting it. Although, the return of in-person meetings has reinvigorated relationships with customers, the survey also shows that the addition of digital marketing through social media and other digital means has broadened their reach in 2022 to a new, more tech-savvy audience," Boulay said.

How does this translate to tank monitoring? Besides the numerous internal benefits that tank monitoring provides, giving your customers an accurate, updated view of their tank and facilitating direct, easy communication with them through an app or other digital communications is paramount in today's propane market.

Below, hear from four tank monitoring providers on common pain points, features that have convinced marketers to make the investment, key items companies often forget to consider when adopting tank monitoring, and more. Meet the respondents:

- Bridget Piraino, senior vice president, customer growth, Anova
- Kevin Jaffe, chief operating officer, MopekaIOT
- Brian Humphrey, CEO, and Andrew Haller, business development manager, One-Tank
- Andre Boulay, president, Otodata

WHAT PAIN POINTS ARE MOST MARKETERS STILL LOOKING TO ALLEVIATE WITH TANK MONITORING ADVANCEMENTS?

MopekaIOT: Marketers invariably still struggle to understand the true volumes in the tanks they manage. They understand that accurate tank monitoring is needed but have been reticent about embracing new technology that they know can/will assist. It's about shifting the mindset to show people that a better solution exists that is not only cost-effective, but reliable, accurate, simple to install and that will give them the knowledge they need to better manage their customer engagement and operations.

One-Tank: The propane industry prides itself on great customer service. Historically, this is an area where many tank monitoring solutions have let the industry down. There is a lot of room for growth in this department, and we are beginning to see the early stages of more stable technology that is backed with better support.

Otodata: We've noticed that monitor deployment and maintenance are still challenging due to limited resources. The high cost of diesel is also a factor, and most companies are dealing with driver shortages. Many retail customers like having access to tank information via a mobile app. These factors have made it more important than ever to deploy a

strong tank monitoring process.

Anova: The industry continues to seek operational efficiency through digitalization, particularly by the deployment of tank monitors. This effort also generates downstream benefits that address key pain points. The industry is facing dramatic loss of driver capacity post-pandemic. This is resulting in a rapid rise in driver pay and benefits, as well as shortages. Without tank monitors and the resulting efficiency gains, it is hard to see how some would be able to get through a very cold winter without loss of revenue, making a difficult situation even worse. The monitor has the added advantage of improving driver lifestyle through reduced emergency fills from run outs late at night and the reduction in safety incidents. CO_2 emissions go down. With [our products], we have been able to quantify the reduction in miles driven and aggregate CO_2 emissions reduction, generally. The ability to integrate data from the tank directly to back-office systems is a top source of efficiency and business improvement.

HOW CAN MARKETERS IMPROVE BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE THROUGH REMOTE TANK MONITORING?

One-Tank: If you can't measure it, you can't improve it. Gaining visibility of usage data on tanks is more valuable than any single employee (or handful of them) and could be more valuable than another bobtail truck added to your fleet. Increase safety, eliminate will calls, deliver more gallons with fewer miles driven and provide better service to the customer base. Using technology is the key for marketers to add value, increase resilience and become more proactive to get ahead of issues that may be coming down the pipeline (no pun intended). Our goal is to increase safety, eliminate will calls, deliver more gallons with fewer miles driven, and provide better service to the customer base.

Anova: Tank monitors are primarily deployed on domestic and commercial tanks with the sole purpose of avoiding runouts and increasing the gallons per stop. If we can see very granular consumption models, know on any given day how much product is in secondary and tertiary storage and what the likely demand will be in the "near future," we can more precisely manage when and at what cost we buy bulk propane from producers and optimize inventory turns. Furthermore, complex algorithms allow machines to calculate the optimized delivery model through the winter months. Rather than just focusing on maximum delivery volume, it can determine each consumer's historical daily consumption and determine which tanks, topped off early, will avoid one or even two fills during the winter months. By doing this across thousands of customers, the machine presents a delivery schedule that has a lower peak than prior years, reducing the necessary number of trucks by moving deliveries to pre- and post-winter months where possible.

MopekaIOT: Marketers must better understand their business and the impacts of their decisions. They need access to data that allows them to understand the cause and effect in real time. True business intelligence will provide guidance on the things you know and insight into things you don't. By partnering with the right organization, they will understand this and will not only supply the hardware and data but also give you a layer of business intelligence throughout their system.

Otodata: To help marketers understand where they can improve their business is by maximizing the benefits of their tank monitoring solution. To achieve that, they need the right tools and support. We are creating advanced algorithms to help clients improve delivery logistics. We can analyze their delivery data to help identify the best targets where they will gain most efficiency and maximize overall ROI.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT STEPS A MARKETER CAN TAKE IN BUILDING A TANK MONITORING STRATEGY INTO THEIR BUSINESS MODEL?

Otodata: The most important steps are definitely monitoring data integration, planning install rollouts, proper training — which we can assist with — and assigning the appropriate resources internally. By having a solid foundation, it ensures an increased ROI, improved customer satisfaction and getting more done with less resources.

MopekaIOT: Be open and inquisitive to new technology. Select the right partner that has a solution that can exceed your expectations and set you up for the future. Find a solution that is more inclusive; your tank monitoring strategy should not just be about your problem tanks. It's about managing your entire fleet and realizing the efficiencies in doing so. Think about the short- and the long-term benefits and challenges. For example, some solutions may appear cheaper on the outset, but the hidden costs and long-term ownership can prove incredibly costly, detrimentally impacting the bottom line. Do your homework. Talk to existing customers.



Anova: The two most important steps in building a tank monitor strategy are investment targeting and forecasting system integration. A distributor must start by identifying where the

deployment of tank monitors would return the highest return on investment (ROI), i.e., the routes with the least predictable tanks and the lowest fill rates. Secondly, they must make sure their back forecast and ticketing system is integrated with the tank monitoring cloud application using APIs or batch files if APIs are unavailable.

This ensures that as new level data is reported, it is automatically passed through to the forecasting systems where dispatchers can schedule tickets appropriately. Without integration, monitoring will not scale as dispatcher workload switching between monitoring and forecasting applications becomes unmanageable and tickets get delayed or lost.

One-Tank: It's important to have a plan in place when adopting new technology of any kind. Different tank monitors provide different benefits and features, but at the end of the day it is a tool to be used. And like any other tool, the value it provides is contingent on the one who uses it. Just as a wrench won't fix your car on its own, a tank monitoring system won't automatically improve your business. It's important to remember that a new tank monitoring system will provide the most value when it is integrated into daily operations and will require some level of support and maintenance just like any other system in your business.

HOW ARE TANK MONITORING PROVIDERS WORKING TO CONVINCE HESITANT MARKETERS TO EMBRACE THE TECHNOLOGY?

MopekaIOT:

1. Aware — It's all about awareness and making it known that there is now a true solution that is more accurate and reliable than the solutions that have traditionally been sold or used.
2. Cost-effective — The solution should be fit for purpose, reliable and at a price point to meet market needs.
3. Simple to use — The product must have a fast time-to-market with a simple installation process.
4. Powerful telemetry — The product needs the business intelligence to empower the decisions of today and to assist providing the knowledge to drive the strategies of tomorrow.
5. Business efficiencies — The product should demonstrate the ROI associated with a fleet deployment.



Anova: At Anova, we show them the benefits — using their own data. We can identify the thousands of miles driven unnecessarily, the unpredictable locations where having a tank monitor would drive the highest ROI, and pinpoint best practices in play at high-performing districts, all from analyzing their historical delivery data. Then, once they become a customer, we mix in new, tank-level insights. The insight is real. They can see the path to driving fewer miles and delivering more product. They can see new truck capacity to take on new districts and grow the business. It's a win-win for the business, for the drivers and for customers.

Otodata: We do it by presenting the various advantages of our products and services, such as robust and long-lasting hardware. We also explain that benefits extend further than just economical, such as increased customer satisfaction and the benefits of digital communication via our free branded app. We discuss their ROI, customer acquisition costs and retention value.

One-Tank: Every business is different and has different needs, so it's important to get to know the options that are available and how they can be tailored to meet your needs. With that said, I have found that many marketers' primary concern is the cost, and for good reason. It's important to weigh the costs of tank monitoring implementation, but it's also important to consider the costs if you keep everything the same. When executed properly, tank monitoring not only pays for itself, but can also generate new revenue streams.

WHEN IMPLEMENTING A TANK MONITORING SYSTEM, WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR MARKETERS TO PLAN AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE SLOW SEASON?

Anova: When winter hits, things can get a little crazy. That's why having tank monitors already deployed in the field helps keep drivers safer when propane use and demand spikes. In addition to procuring and installing tank monitors in the quieter months, marketers are also able to shave some of the peak demand off the winter season with advanced analytics that provide insight into the tank locations that, if topped off in the summer or fall, won't need a visit in winter. Further, these earlier deliveries and propane supply purchases help marketers meet their supply allocations, ensuring they will get more when they need it later in the year.

MopekaIOT: During peak season, marketer teams are more focused than ever on supplying product to customers. They are not available for new tasks in many cases, as they are on a tight schedule. During slow season, staff availability is greater, and deploying a tank monitoring solution at this time means they can learn the ease of deployment whilst giving them face time with the customer when this may not normally have been the case. In addition, it gives them a greater ability to become familiar with the solution and the telemetry it can provide. It also gives them time in the field to troubleshoot and the ability to ask questions to further their knowledge and familiarity.

One-Tank: We recommend installing our monitors whenever a new install is done

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TANK MONITORING FOR AUTOGAS FLEETS

How remote monitoring can improve the autogas refueling process

By Derek Rimko, *vice president of operations, Superior Energy Systems*

Did you include autogas refueling stations in your tank monitoring strategy? Below, Derek Rimko discusses Superior Energy Systems' tank monitoring offerings for fleet usage. For more on autogas, turn the page for this month's feature series covering current domestic and global autogas sector growth.

Superior Energy Systems recently made remote tank monitoring available for fleets. What drove this innovation?

Superior Energy Systems' customers were continuously requesting a one-stop shop for tank monitoring along with the fleet management software. Superior Energy Systems previously utilized similar technology at their midstream terminal and bulk plant locations that made adapting a solution easier. The company also found that fleets new to propane autogas often run out of fuel before they expect to need a fuel delivery, which caused multiple issues. This innovation answers all those needs.

How do fleets monitor their tanks? And how many tanks can be monitored?

An unlimited number of tanks can be monitored simultaneously. To monitor tanks, fleets simply log into their Superior Energy Systems Fleet account from any internet-enabled device. The tank inventory levels are accessed through the home page.

What are other benefits of this software?

Fleets are eager to use the monitoring solution because it enables them to easily view their tank inventory and set alerts for specified tank levels. It also helps fleets eliminate dispenser and skid downtime with additional troubleshooting capabilities from the Superior Energy Systems side.

Thus, instead of Superior Energy Systems staff having to travel for a quick fix, many issues can be resolved with remote system monitoring. Fleets are also impressed that no additional software is required for the monitoring system if they already utilize the Superior Energy Systems propane autogas fleet management system.

What has been the customer response?

Customers are excited that they do not have to use multiple platforms to monitor their inventory levels and they also appreciate the increased remote capabilities offered by the system.

What's next for Superior Energy Systems?

We continue to offer the most effective technology and make advancements in propane autogas refueling, including our control system and back-end software. In addition, Superior Energy Systems continues to support both the midstream and industrial propane markets with equipment, systems and solutions.

year-round. That's a low-effort, passive approach that ensures all new customers get monitors while existing ones receive their monitors whenever the driver makes a delivery. There is no need to send someone with the express mission to install monitors when it can be done within a year by supplying drivers with units to be deployed anytime they make a delivery to a customer who doesn't have one. It doesn't matter which season.



One-Tank

Otodata: We always recommend that marketers take advantage of their slower seasons because they have the time and the opportunity to review their logistics plan and better schedule large deployments. Although, most marketers agree with this strategy, others prefer to use their busy season because their teams are already in the field filling tanks and monitors can easily be installed at the same time.

WHAT DO YOU OFTEN SEE MARKETERS FORGETTING TO INCLUDE WHEN IT COMES TO THEIR TANK MONITORING STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION?

Anova: We do see some tank monitors that are shipped out the door but are not activated. Sometimes, this is because they want their own stockpile. Other times, it is because they don't have the time or labor to conduct the necessary installations. So, sure, things might get overlooked in the excitement of going big in tank monitoring. The trick lies in identifying the best location to deploy them and having the team ready and able to do it.

MopekaIOT: Time is always key here. Having the people available and the knowledge of tank locations is also tremendously important. Long-term cost of ownership of sensors versus upfront costs. Understanding that their customers' knowledge and expectations are changing. Information and transparency into the supply chain is increasingly a differentiator for marketers.

One-Tank: It's easy for marketers to forget that tank monitors can do a lot more than just report a tank level. Increasing margin, reducing cost, increasing safety and generating new revenue streams are just a few examples of what can be achieved. Few marketers consider the available field storage (or tertiary storage) in a customer's propane tank because virtual metering has not been a reality up until now. We are trying to raise awareness of the potential for next-level ROI that enabling hundreds of thousands of gallons of field storage can bring to a marketer.

Otodata: Initially the concern with tank monitoring was about helping companies avoid runouts, but as time has gone on, tank monitoring has been used more for maximizing efficiency through a detailed understanding of each customer's consumption. We soon made a shift to focusing solely on various aspects of tank monitoring and efficiently fulfilling needs with the best possible delivery plan for customers. Therefore, we feel that marketers need to utilize monitoring data and adapt processes internally to see the real impact of our solution.

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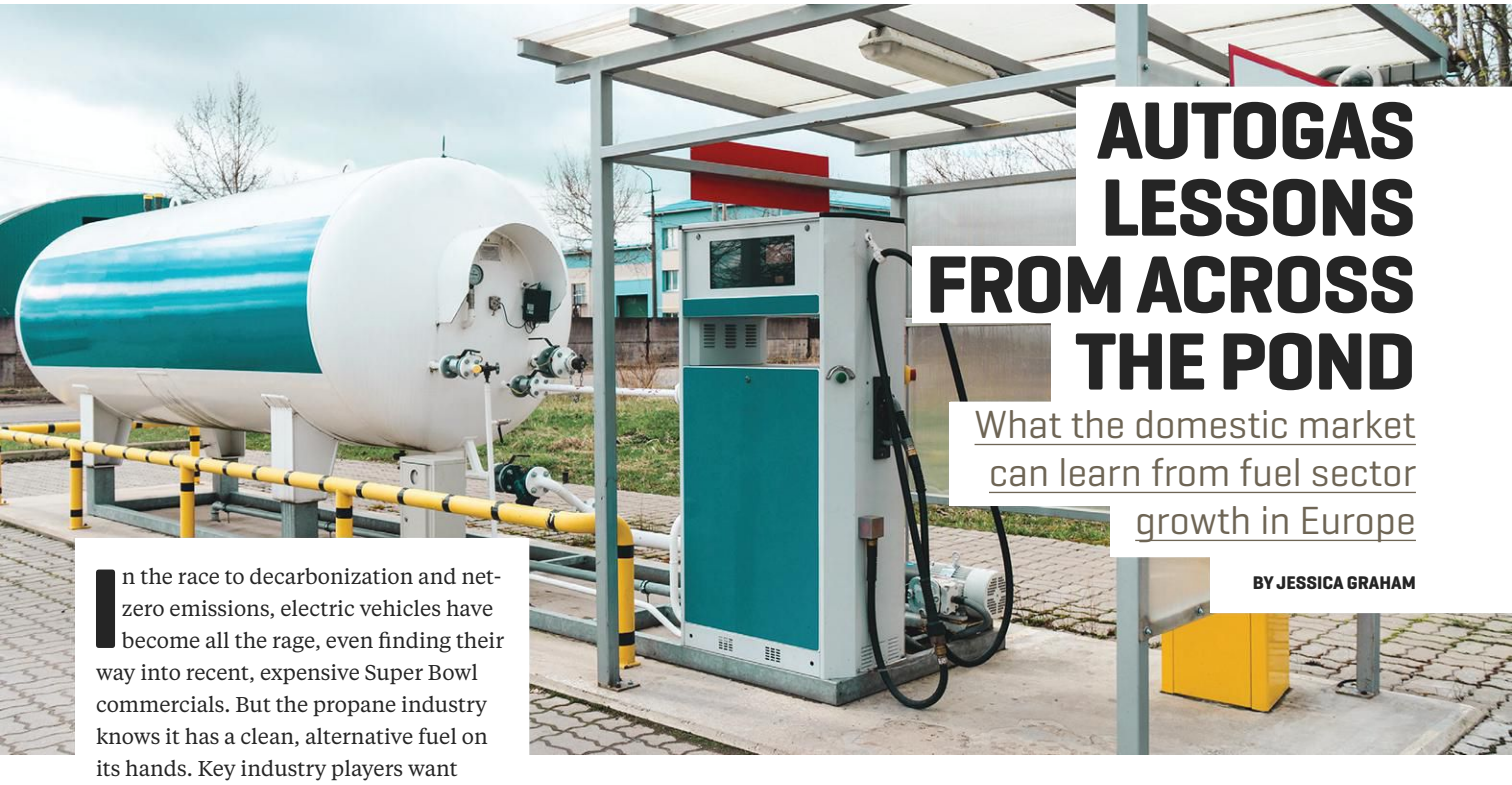
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AUTOGAS LESSONS FROM ACROSS THE POND

What the domestic market can learn from fuel sector growth in Europe

BY JESSICA GRAHAM

In the race to decarbonization and net-zero emissions, electric vehicles have become all the rage, even finding their way into recent, expensive Super Bowl commercials. But the propane industry knows it has a clean, alternative fuel on its hands. Key industry players want autogas-powered vehicles to get their fair time in the spotlight. And in places like Europe, they're getting just that.

According to the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association (ACEA), the markets for battery electric and hybrid electric vehicles in Europe are growing in the alternative power sector.

But ACEA also reported that vehicles powered by liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) grew by 16.7% in the last quarter of 2022. (Natural gas, on the other hand, saw substantial declines during the same time period.)

There are several autogas trends, wins and challenges from the European market that can be translated to the needs of the North American market. Here's what one industry expert is seeing in both North America and across the Atlantic.

2023 Autogas Trends

So, how are things looking for the autogas sector in 2023? According to Robbie Smit, area manager for Prins in North America, a manufacturer of alternative fuel systems that also has an office in the Netherlands, the view is quite positive.

The recovery period that started in 2022 as pandemic downturns began coming to an end is continuing into 2023. While fuel prices are still high, Smit expects United States vehicle manufacturers to improve production output after being held back on opportunities last year — meaning hopefully a better flow of vehicle availability.

Because Prins is in the automotive field, the vehicle supply chain in 2022 directly affected the brand and its autogas engine systems.

"Luckily, at the second half of 2022, we saw some improvements there. They're continuing in what we see at the moment," Smit said. "Traditionally, January and February are a little bit slower in the North American autogas upfit business. But that's not the case this year. We contribute that to more vehicle supply and sales growth."

According to Smit, manufacturers now seem to expand on and implement more autogas vehicles to help combat fuel prices. Smit has also observed autogas trending in the sustainability conversation.

"The sustainability message is only increasing," he said. "There's so much talk about sustainability today, and autogas plays a role in sustainability. That means we are benefitting from that conversation, which is more active than two or three years ago."

Autogas Wins in the European Market

Autogas in North America is centered around fuel for truck fleets — this is not the case in the European market. The passenger car takes center stage in Europe, with autogas being the third-most utilized fuel for cars, according to Smit.

Autogas helps European drivers cut their high fuel bills practically in half; brands like Prins bank on this messaging at the consumer level by making clear that autogas is a cleaner, more affordable fuel for Europeans.

"The start of the conflict in Ukraine spiked gasoline prices to record-high energy prices in general," Smit said. "We faced an energy crisis in Europe, and with those record-breaking prices, it cuts into people's budgets. Autogas has always had the position of being much more affordable than gasoline. The difference is that gasoline became unaffordable for

some people. Autogas made it possible for people to at least have an option to still use their car if they changed the fuel [system]."

In particular, the popularity of the Dodge RAM could help implement more autogas vehicles in the market. This American pickup truck is seeing an increase in imports to Europe, and many drivers are looking to drive them on autogas.

"[The RAM] is the brand of choice by the European consumer and small businesses. ... One can say about 90% of all American brand pickup trucks that get into Europe in the mainland are being converted to autogas. And the main reason is the expensive gasoline," said Smit.

Autogas Challenges in the European Market

Regulations and tax policies differ from country to country, and they're also always changing or new policies are being implemented. That's a hurdle for brands like Prins; they must keep up with these policies and adapt to the application of new rules. It also means keeping up with evolving vehicle technology.

"Europe is ahead of North America with the implementation of direct injection [DI] engines," said Smit. "We've been developing a lot of our systems to these newer engines. ... It costs us a lot of time and energy, so we've got to invest, get more engineers, get more engineering time. We have to apply cost. We have to create new systems. We sometimes have to create new hardware to be able to keep supplying this autogas market. So, we've got to stay current and up to date with technology, but also must follow the regulations that are being implemented."

How Does North America Compare?

The most obvious difference between the North American and European markets is the sheer size difference. With individual states closer in size to many European countries, it's a lot of ground to cover with fueling infrastructure.

"Implementing a fuel infrastructure is complex," said Smit. "The infrastructure setup in North America is more customer- or regional-based, and in Europe it is more country-based — of course keeping regulation and taxation in mind. That means in main autogas markets like Italy, Poland, Germany and the Netherlands, at almost every gasoline station, you find an autogas pump, as well. In North America, the focus is on on-site fueling and regional network creation."

According to Smit, players in the autogas sector know it is impossible to grow the market everywhere in North America.

"Our partners and distribution networks are very experienced. What we're trying to do is to make sure that we create autogas markets in regions where it makes sense," he said.

There's also still the matter of education and knowledge. Creating awareness about autogas for fleet vehicles is very high on the list. Autogas awareness is leading to more fleets implementing the fuel. But, in Smit's perspective, the autogas sector is still working to "get in people's minds," and bring a greater awareness to those who haven't heard about the opportunity to use autogas as a fleet fuel.

Takeaways for the North American Market

The autogas industry has found success in propane school buses, and autogas as a fuel in U.S. postal carriers, lawnmowers and forklifts has seen increasing integration. It's in autogas-powered fleets that Prins is pooling a lot of its focus. As the European market focuses on autogas in passenger vehicles as a solution to high-priced gasoline, Smit says it's about focusing on market segments in North America where autogas is the best fuel and the best solution.

"The European market is consumer-driven, and in North America it's business fleet-driven. We have [business to consumer] websites here in Europe that we cater to every specific region, or some countries and languages."

Prins' answer to this kind of outreach for fleets is in its new Autogas for Fleets website, an essentially unbranded landing space that provides a stage for autogas, and also direct contact with business consumers in order to grow the autogas market here.

"[The website] is showing main market segments. I can use an example from Europe where we are successful, but autogas in that segment may not be attractive like that in North America. We want to bring forward where we've already seen success stories to be told and to be found. A lot of it is about showing this broad use [of autogas] that already exists, but a lot of people might not know about," said Smit.

And when it comes down to it, the North American market is primed for growth, as autogas integration here is still relatively small. One of Prins' major successes in the European market has been through high displacement engines (V6, V8 and V10), of which the North American market is filled.

Autogas Is 'Here to Stay'

At the heart of the push to grow the autogas market is a collective effort to reduce emissions with an alternative fuel. Electrification still gets the most attention, discussion and support, but people like Smit are determined that autogas will remain relevant in the sustainability conversation.

"We want to give the world, and definitely North America, the opportunity to drive existing vehicles on an alternative fuel. That fuel is cleaner and it's more cost-efficient, more affordable," he said. "As long as there are vehicles in North America that can be outfitted [for autogas], we will continue to grow the market ... with our partners like Alliance AutoGas in the U.S. and Maxquip in Canada. Everybody wants to reinforce that autogas and internal combustion engines are here to stay. They might change, but they're here to stay. That's what we believe in."

Jessica Graham is managing editor of Butane-Propane News.



ANSWERS TO THE MOST COMMON **PROPANE AUTOGAS QUESTIONS**

From expense & performance to fueling infrastructure & vehicle servicing, get the insight you need for potential autogas fleets

BY TODD MOUW

Is it possible for American industries that require consistent, long-term transportation of people and/or goods — like parcel delivery, transit/paratransit and food delivery — to easily and quickly meet new United States emissions standards? *The answer is yes.*

It's true that the long-term solution to dramatically reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 2035 is multifaceted. But a key piece of the puzzle right now is fleets that are fully fueled by propane autogas.

Most people don't know that vehicles can run on propane autogas. But the truth is that many fleet operators in the U.S. have already transitioned entire fleets to operate exclusively on propane as an affordable way to cut emissions, improve budgets and easily meet federal guidelines. There are more than 20,000 trucks, vans and buses equipped with Roush CleanTech propane autogas fuel systems across the U.S. and Canada today — and that number is growing.

To clear the air about how fleets in every industry can adopt propane autogas as a main fuel source, we're offering answers to the most common questions about vehicles fueled by propane.

Q: Are propane vehicles more expensive than diesel or gasoline vehicles?

A: The quick answer? No. The longer answer: Despite a low initial additional cost associated with a propane upfit for trucks and buses, the long-term savings on fuel and maintenance lower the total cost of ownership over the lifetime of the vehicle. In fact, fleets typically see savings of up to 50% on fuel and maintenance in the first year.

Here's how purchasing a propane vehicle works: The cost of a propane truck or bus starts off the same as it would for an equivalent gasoline or diesel model. Once a business opts for propane, the commercial vehicles are then upfitted with propane fuel systems.

Q: What is the difference between a propane truck and a gasoline or diesel truck?

A: On the outside, there aren't many visible differences on the vehicle. For example, ROUSH CleanTech's propane autogas fuel system seamlessly integrates into the vehicle. Internally, the fuel lines follow the OEM routing, and the fuel tank generally replaces the standard tank location. The system delivers propane to the engine in liquid form, ensuring zero compromise in vehicle performance. Depending on the application, there may be a propane tank visible on either side of the truck.

Another difference about the internal structure is that propane fuel systems are clean from the beginning. Therefore, propane trucks don't require complex and costly after-treatment systems, and

propane vehicles eliminate the need for components like diesel particulate filters, EGR coolers and SCR parts.

Q: What differences in performance or range can be expected with a propane vehicle?

A: Fleet operators can expect the same performance and range with a propane vehicle as they would with a diesel or gasoline model. In fact, performance actually increases for fleets operating in cold weather because propane autogas doesn't run the risk of gelling. Vehicles equipped with propane fuel systems maintain the same horsepower, torque and towing capacity as those fueled with diesel or gasoline. They also have comparable range without compromising the operation. Check with the propane fuel system manufacturer for specifics.

Q: How do I know propane trucks will make financial sense?

A: At a quick glance, it's easy to see where propane vehicles are more cost-effective than diesel or gasoline. On average, propane fuel is 40% less expensive than gasoline and about 50% less than diesel. Most fleets lock in an annual, per-gallon fuel cost for propane so price and supply remain consistent, allowing for better budgeting. Reduced maintenance costs and less wear and tear on the engine and components result in dramatic savings, too. There are online tools to help calculate and compare potential savings,



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Q: Is servicing propane vehicles burdensome?

A: No. Propane vehicles are not complicated to service, and technicians report a high level of enjoyment working on propane vehicles. In-house mechanics can quickly learn how to service propane vehicles and often find them more enjoyable to engage with. Technicians report a better day-to-day experience with propane autogas because the system is easier and cleaner. They don't have to deal with fuel leaks or spills, and they don't smell like gasoline or diesel at the end of the day.

Unlike diesel, specialized technicians are not required to work on propane vehicles, so they're easier and less expensive to hire. Existing standard diagnostic equipment can be used or propane trucks can be taken to a service center. Be sure to ask your propane fuel system manufacturer if there's a certified service station near you.

> On average, propane fuel is 40% less expensive than gasoline & about 50% less than diesel.

Q: How and where will I fuel a propane truck?

A: There are multiple, easy-to-use options to fuel a propane vehicle. Many fleet managers elect to install low- or no-cost on-site fueling infrastructure, eliminating trips to off-site stations. Most people don't know that propane fueling infrastructure costs less than any other transportation energy source — conventional or alternative. There are also several federal and state incentive programs available to offset infrastructure costs.

Mobile fueling — where a supplier comes directly to you to fill up vehicles — is another option. In addition, there are thousands of propane fueling stations across the U.S., with stations in every state. When connecting with a local propane marketer, they can help walk interested parties through the options that make the most sense based on fleet size, routes, budget and facility space.

Todd Mouw is executive vice president of sales and marketing for ROUSH CleanTech, an industry leader of alternative fuel vehicle technology. Mouw has served as president of the NTEA Green Truck Association. To learn more or if you have questions about the process and benefits of integrating propane vehicles, call 800-59-ROUSH or visit roushcleantech.com.





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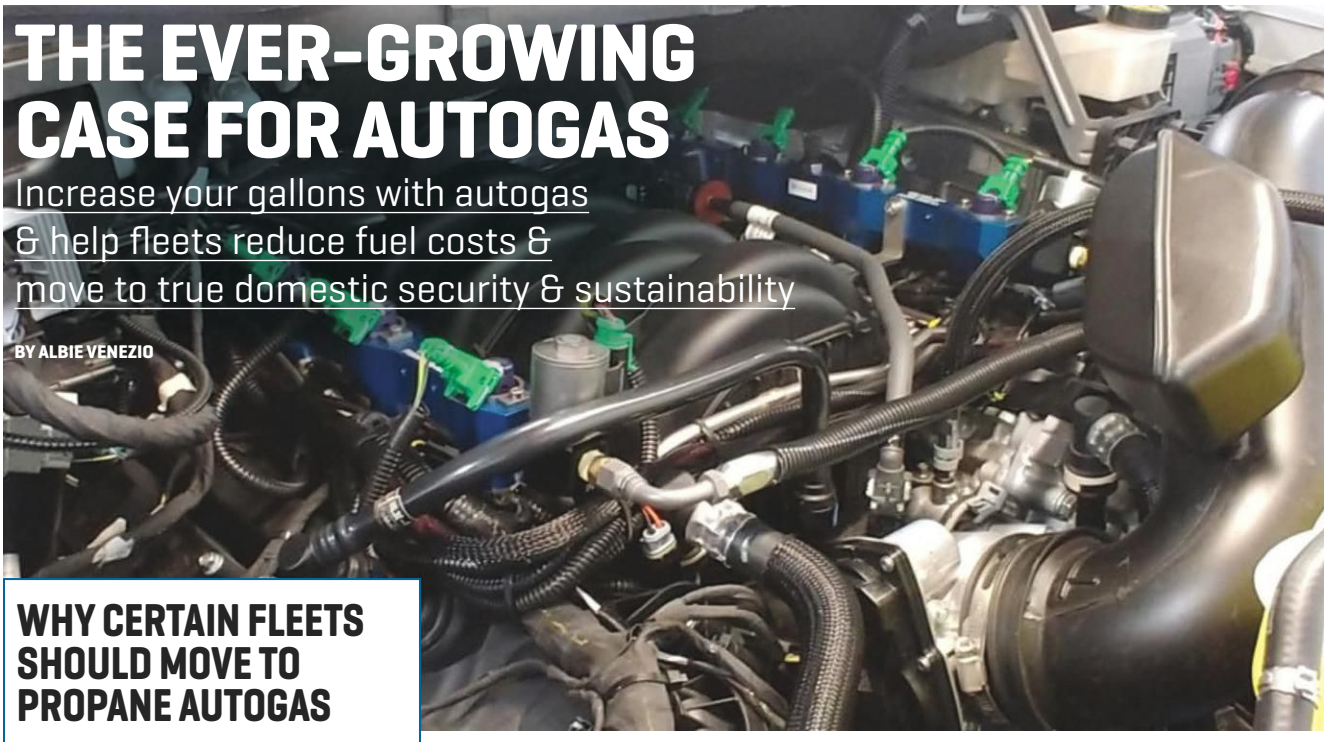
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THE EVER-GROWING CASE FOR AUTOGAS

Increase your gallons with autogas & help fleets reduce fuel costs & move to true domestic security & sustainability

BY ALBIE VENEZIO



WHY CERTAIN FLEETS SHOULD MOVE TO PROPANE AUTOGAS

- Autogas will dramatically reduce fuel costs. Often the system return on investment (ROI) for fleets is 1 to 3 years — if not sooner — with the help of state and federal incentives.
- Propane supply in the United States is mostly domestic. As such, fleets have an important fuel security which is vital in an increasingly volatile world. This includes the possibility to lock in fuel pricing for optimal budgeting.
- Autogas will dramatically reduce emissions and play a key role in developing sustainability and the greening of fleets.
- Performance, torque, drivability and miles per gallon are comparable to gasoline.

Propane autogas conversions often have the lowest cost of ownership of any fuel. Autogas conversions have substantially less upfront costs compared to compressed natural gas (CNG) and electric conversions. This is due largely to the difference in the cost of tanks; when comparing liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) tanks rated for 350 to 375 psi and CNG tanks rated for 3,500 to 4,500 psi — which are often carbon fiber reinforced — propane fits similar guidelines as those for gasoline.

For technicians, the learning curve is easy to understand. When working with other alternative fuels, expensive modifications to buildings are often required.

Examples of estimated fleet usage of propane in sectors optimal for propane autogas include:

- *Shuttle buses* — Average life span of 5 to 8 years, utilizing 3,000 to 8,000 gallons a year
- *School buses* — Average life span of 10 to 15 years, utilizing 2,500 to 8,000 gallons a year
- *Package delivery trucks (UPS, DHL, FedEx, etc.)* — Average life span of 7 to 15 years, utilizing 3,000 to 10,000 gallons a year
- *Work trucks* — Average life span of 5 to 7 years, utilizing 2,500 to 7,500 gallons a year
- *Taxi or similar vehicle* — Average life span of 5 to 10 years, utilizing 2,000 to 6,000 gallons a year

While autogas may not be the right fit for every fleet sector, the estimates above demonstrate how rapidly the return on investment can be achieved.

Domestic Fuels & the Illusion of Electric Vehicles

We believe a menu of domestic fuels in the transportation sector, including propane and natural gas in particular, is optimal for national security and the support and growth of our economy at reasonable costs. Electric vehicles (EVs) surely have their place in the smaller vehicle, metropolitan, limited driving sector. However, the illusion of EVs as the panacea is being shattered by reality in short order:

- The majority of U.S. electricity comes from natural gas or coal. Utilizing natural gas or its brother-fuel propane directly in engines is much more efficient and has fewer emissions.
- The energy — which consists mostly of diesel — utilized to mine the rare earth metals that comprise an EV battery is immense.
- China controls the majority of the world's rare earth metals and electric EV supply chain.
- The amount of EV batteries that can be manufactured in the near future is nowhere near enough for the extensive projections of an EV world.

ICOM North America expanded the propane autogas sector with the introduction of the patented ICOM Propane Liquid Injection System in 2004. The company provides system installation and a maintenance program for fleets utilizing ICOM factory technicians, the ICOM dealer network or their local service provider. Installation and training can often be done at the propane fleet's site or at their local service shop.

Forthcoming ICOM technologies have the goal of facilitating a huge increase in autogas gallons. The ICOM Blue 3.0 Propane Liquid Injection System has numerous Environmental Protection Agency certifications, with others in process or planned. All platforms are available in bi-fuel, and some platforms are available in monofuel as well.

The ICOM Dynamic Dual Fuel System for diesel engines will be available soon in the U.S. and will use considerable amounts of autogas in sectors which usually use less propane, such as class 6, 7 and 8 trucks; construction, agriculture and mining vehicles and equipment; and large generators. Examples of estimated diesel dual fuel LPG gallons at average displacement of 30% include:

- *Long haul buses* — Life span 15 years, 6,500 to 10,000 gallons a year
- *Mining equipment [cat 777]* — Life span 10 to 20 years, 13,000 to 15,000 gallons a year
- *Pickups/towing/hauling* — Life span 10 years, 2,500 to 6,000 gallons a year
- *Large generators and equipment of 10-plus years* — Life span often 3,000 to 10,000 gallons a year

- The U.S. grid requires trillions of dollars of investment upgrades and decades of manufacturing and building to support EVs occupying only 10% of the U.S. vehicle population.
- More greenhouse gases are produced from the manufacturing of an EV than of an internal combustion engine vehicle due to the minerals required to make the battery.
- EV vehicle range is often not sufficient for fleet routes, especially when considering hot and cold weather, which can reduce range by as much as 40%.

For fleet vehicles, EVs are impractical and far too expensive. Pickup trucks and medium- and heavy-duty vehicles are a demographic where propane autogas has an opportunity to shine. If you are interested in incorporating autogas into your infrastructure, information on autogas and other alternative fuels, including incentives and rebates, is available at afdc.energy.gov/fuels/laws/LPG?state=US.

Albie Venezio is the director of technical services for ICOM North America, which is a leader and innovator in alternative fuels systems for LPG, CNG, LNG, DME and other alternative fuels. ICOM designs, patents, engineers, manufactures, installs and supports autogas fuel systems for private and fleet vehicles. Venezio started in the industry almost 15 years ago as a technician and progressed to a world class technician, trainer, product developer, calibration specialist and team leader for projects in 12 countries, including many diesel dual fuel natural gas or propane engine projects.



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THE IMPORTANCE OF PLANNING FOR FUTURE SALES WITH YOUR TEAM

Set up your sales reps for success with comprehensive plans & meaningful goals

BY ED VARNEY



There are many ways to grow your business. The best and most common ways are through new sales or acquisitions. Both have their value and need proper execution and analysis to execute properly. Planning is critical to success in either of these strategies.

A solid sales plan is one of the most important elements of selling. It takes time to build a plan, but you risk failure without it. When I was in the landscape industry, the best lesson I learned was that you "dig a hundred-dollar hole for a five-dollar tree." This allows the roots to expand easier and provides a much higher chance that the tree will mature and thrive. A solid sales plan will also help to forecast the financial and production needs of your company. The plan is the foundation for success.

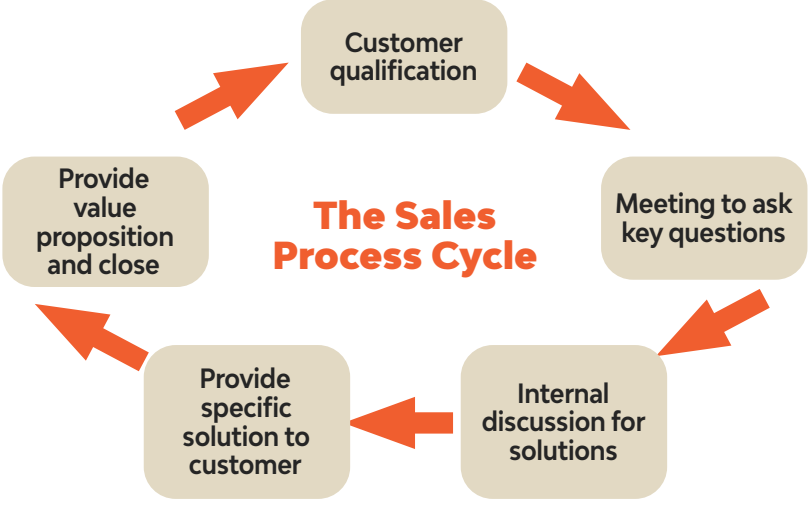
Sales is not just about a salesperson calling on new or existing customers. It is a process. When followed with discipline, it can be highly successful. We need to fully understand the process. To do this, we must do our homework.

The sales process is relatively simple (see flowchart at right). It all starts with your team. How do you begin? The most important element is for your team to understand what you are selling. Is it a product, service, value, peace of mind, etc.? The correct answer is all the above.

Encourage your sales team to keep in mind that listening to the prospective customer is the most important part of the process. By asking the right questions and listening to the customer, your sales representatives will be more effective at providing solutions. One strategy is to keep customer needs in the conversation. Jerry Acuff writes in his book "Start Thinking Like a Buyer" that the focus is on your customer, not you. What does this mean? It means your sales team needs to relate to the customers in a customer-oriented way. Work with your team on being polite and finding some common ground with customers to set the tone and gain trust.

Acuff provides some simple steps to engage customers. Here are a few you should consider:

- "Prepare for the call not because it is important to you, but because it is important to them."
- "Remember all conversations are voluntary and the ideal listen/talk ratio is 50/50."



- "Meaningful dialogue begins with intent and ends with your assessment."

These strategies will encourage relationships and increase trust between your salespeople and the customers. We always hear that people buy from people. This is especially true when people are thinking about spending their money — people are more likely to invest in purchases from someone they trust.

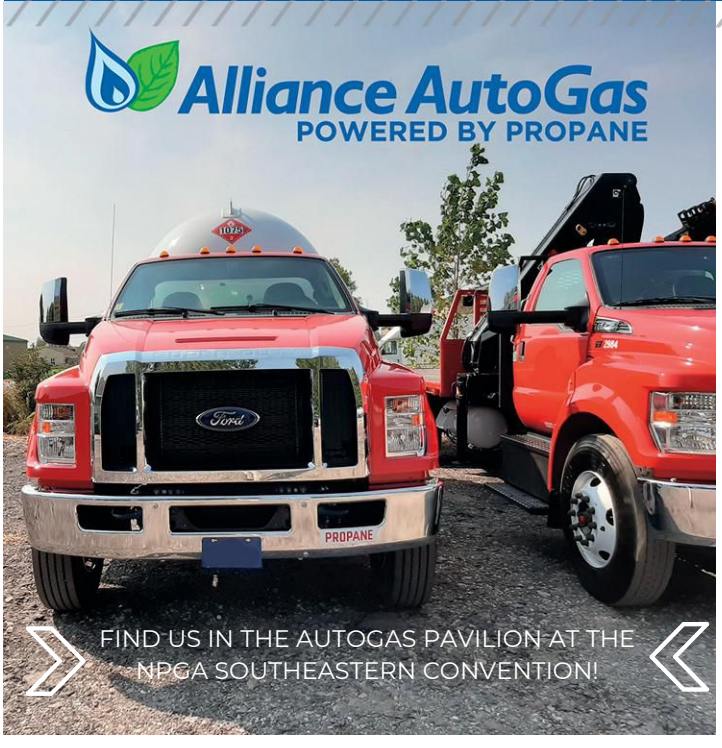
> When I was in the landscape industry, the best lesson I learned was that you 'dig a hundred-dollar hole for a five-dollar tree.' This allows the roots to expand easier and provides a much higher chance that the tree will mature and thrive. A solid sales plan ... is the foundation for success.

SETTING GOALS

The research and homework your sales representatives do prior to visiting a customer is part of planning. Start by setting goals with your team. These goals must be realistic and measurable. This involves understanding your markets, offerings, business climate, competition and more. Goals are a great tool, but useless unless you have a strategy and plan to execute and achieve the goals.

Individual sales goals must align with your company goals. Many companies set sales goals while not considering the overall company objective. For example, a sales manager may set goals related to how many new customers they want to gain. The salesperson's objective becomes gaining as many new accounts as they can to gain the maximum compensations. But if the company has minimum profit margins and a profile for good accounts, this must be part of the goal. If a salesperson gains 100 new customers at a low profit, this can be a negative impact to the company.

Low profit is not just the margin; it is also the total cost of gaining and maintaining the customer. These costs can include introductory offers, slow paying accounts and high-maintenance



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and demanding customers. All these cost the company in labor and financials. It is critical that the plan includes desirable and profitable targets for your sales team.

SALES PLANNING

Sales planning is the process salespeople follow to determine how they will meet sales goals. Sales plans should include documenting goals, actions and timelines. There are several websites and organizations with basic plan templates.

Sales managers and salespeople start this process by creating a list of potential new and existing customers or accounts. This list needs to be prioritized and categorized. You can rank them in value to your organization by a simple A, B, C system. This helps prioritize time spent on each account and ranks accounts according to the company's objectives and strengths. After your sales team ranks the accounts, determine which products or services to sell. A detailed account plan documents the actions and timelines to achieve your goals. Every member of your team should have a plan. This is the key to success. Identify opportunities and build a plan to execute. The plan should include all the steps needed to close deals and gain customers. An account plan does not need to be complicated or elaborate. Keep in mind a simple process works. The elements of the plan must include opportunity, gathering information, an action timeline and a close date.

If you have a customer relationship management system, the process is quite simple and easy to create. If not, it can be accomplished on a simple form. The format is not as important as having all the steps documented. Each individual sales plan should start with the opportunity. Each sales representative should qualify the opportunity first, then gather as much information on the customer as possible, including their needs and expectations. Once researched, the rep can decide on the solution and share with the customer. This is where they close the deal.

FOLLOW UP

It's not always over when your sales representative has closed the deal. The plan for each team member should include follow-up steps to make sure they have met customers' needs. Schedule additional follow-up calls on customers' satisfaction. You may discover that they have concerns related to an aspect of your business together. This can help your team and your company improve.

Ed Varney is CEO of Topline Management in Dallas, Texas. He has been an executive sales leader in the propane and natural gas industry for over 30 years. He has a Master of International Business from Rosemont College in Philadelphia. Topline Management provides executive management consulting, sales training, professional speaker booking and sales meeting planning to global customers.





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TIPS FOR BUILDING A ROBUST MARKETING PLAN FOR 2023



The platforms, strategies & out-of-the-box ideas you need for successful marketing efforts in the year ahead

BY KIRSTEN MCALPIN

It is hard to believe that we are already a few months into 2023. A new year means a new opportunity to refresh, make resolutions and decide what you want to focus on for the year ahead. As you do these things for your business, make sure you include your marketing efforts. Determine what worked for you over the past year and what you can execute better, then brainstorm fresh ideas to implement in your strategy.

For starters, it is hard to execute a marketing campaign without an understanding of what you hope to achieve with it. Are you looking to further your general branding to the public at large? Is there a specific part of your business or a product that you offer that you would like to see grow and you feel like customers would latch on to if they had more awareness of it? Take some time to figure out what you hope to get out of your marketing efforts, which will help you decide what type of advertising avenue you need to use.

A big part of marketing is understanding your audience. Who are you speaking to and who are you wanting to reach? Some companies may have different audiences and sectors with which they do business. Many marketers in the propane industry serve customers in various sectors like agriculture, construction, education and the everyday residential customer. Your marketing team needs to ensure that each message is tailored to fit the audience they are trying to reach.

Do your research and figure out where each sector acquires its information. For example, to reach a potential agricultural customer, find out if there is a local farm report that you can sponsor. These are sometimes in the form of a radio show or a printed format where farmers can get updated prices, weather outlooks and more. To reach the public, I have found that social media advertising, radio and television commercials, and digital marketing through search engine optimization (SEO) and display advertising work well for my company and the goals we are trying to attain.

While you will hopefully start seeing results within a few weeks, it often takes a few months to analyze the impact a marketing campaign is having on your business. There are some things you can do along the way to determine if a campaign is working. One easy thing you can do is to ask your new customers how they found out about you. This is a great way to see if the campaign is reaching the people you are trying to target. You can also include an offer or a promotional code that customers can use toward your product. It gives the customer an incentive to utilize your services, but it is also a way for you to track who is seeing and responding to your advertisement. This can also be executed on digital platforms like your website or social media or through SEO.

Create a network within the propane industry with other marketing professionals and feel free to collaborate and share ideas. I have found it beneficial to talk with other marketing professionals from around the country and see what is working for them. There may be something your company has yet to try, or you may get an idea for a promotion or an event. Remember, though, what

works for one company may not work for another. For example, a company in the Northeast will likely have different marketing goals than a company in the South. Still, there are many issues and promotions that correlate industrywide. Take time to look at other companies' social media profiles and websites to see what they are promoting because it might be something your company can customize to fit your business.

One of the most significant pieces of advice I can offer is to utilize the marketing resources that might be available from the brands that your company sells. Reach out to the sales representatives for the vendors your company purchases products from and ask if they have customizable marketing assets that your company can use to promote their products. Whether you use the available items as inspiration for your own campaign or use the available templates, this is a great way to make sure you are sharing the correctly branded information. It also helps to save time so you can focus on other things.

Also, make sure that you are not missing out on potential co-op funds from the brands you sell. Vendor co-op funds are promotional funds that brands will offer to companies that sell their products. Of course, you will advertise what you sell, so why not get paid back by the brands you promote for selling their products? It is really a win-win for both you and the vendor.

Use social media to your advantage. While you can spend some advertising dollars by boosting posts on social media platforms, you can post on your platforms for free. Create consistent, engaging content that showcases what you offer and showcases your people. I have found that some of the best-performing content features the actual people that work for my company.

By posting your employees, you are highlighting them, which is a great way to show appreciation. But you are also getting your customers familiar with the faces they will see when they walk into your storefront or that will greet them at their homes on deliveries or service calls.

It's important to keep in mind that not everything you do to market your company will work. There may be things that you think will be a big hit that just do not resonate with who you are trying to reach. But there may also be some things that you try and are not sure about that end up being home runs you will use again and again.

Kirsten McAlpin is the director of marketing and public relations for Conger LP Gas Inc. She is currently a student in the integrated marketing communications graduate degree program at West Virginia University and holds a Bachelor of Arts in communication from Columbus State University. McAlpin was also recently named the Southeast Propane Alliance Women in Propane Co-Ambassador. Email kirstenmcalpin@congerlpgas.com. Visit congerlpgas.com.



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5 STEPS TO CRAFTING AN EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE THAT WINS GREAT TALENT

Ensure a positive experience for current & potential employees through your company's unique culture

BY KATHLEEN QUINN VOTAW



Worker expectations have changed dramatically in the past few years and employers are failing to meet people where they are. Consequently, companies are at risk of failing as top talent becomes the most competitive advantage. The best way to attract and retain the people you need is to create the kind of employee experience they demand.

Employees want to feel they belong to a community, doing work that matters under leaders who respect them and show that they care. The propane industry is no different than others in terms of employee expectations. The way to meet those expectations is always the same: put your people first.

We are living in a time where candidates and employees own control. There are more jobs than people to fill them, which means every company in every industry is in competition for top talent. Without exception, job seekers want to know why they should choose you. More than anything else, that choice is based on how you make them feel, which in turn depends on the kind of employee experience you craft for your people.

THE STATUS QUO WON'T WORK

Every industry is struggling with talent shortages, constant change and new technologies. Propane has unique challenges over and above what many other industries face, such as:

- A shortage of trained drivers, along with the Entry Level Driver Training requirement, which could make the process of hiring and training new drivers more difficult for the industry
- Service technicians and transport and delivery drivers who are retiring with insufficient applicants ready for this type of physically demanding work
- The imminent retirement of many industry leaders
- Negative public perceptions of an industry that's slow to change
- Growing regulatory and legislative challenges

The status quo will not help turn these challenges into opportunities. It's time to shift our focus to crafting a positive employee experience. It's the only way to attract and retain people with the skills and character needed to reach our full potential in this industry.

WHAT IS EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE?

Employee experience comprises of the essential emotional connection between employee and employer. It's how you make people feel from the moment they apply for the job through their last day with you. The goal is to create a community where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, while being held accountable to each other and to your mission and goals.

People want recognition for their contributions, a safe work environment

that promotes well-being, feedback on performance, the chance to grow and advance, empowerment to make choices and decisions, flexibility in where and when they work, and confidence that everyone is compensated and treated fairly. This is a tall order for leaders and managers who are stuck in outdated thinking and refuse to discard inflexible practices of the past. To win top talent, you must embrace fundamental change.

5 STEPS TO A POSITIVE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Use these five critical steps as a guide in crafting your ideal employee experience strategy. Don't try to copy another company's culture; make it uniquely yours. It will help you attract and retain talent with the specific skills and culture you need for your business to succeed.

Step 1: Hire the right people at every level.

Develop a recruiting process built on a sales model with a pipeline of diverse and widely sourced candidates. This creates a pool of prospective employees, eliminating the need to compromise at the last minute to fill an open position. Recruit for attitude and values alignment; don't focus exclusively on skills and experience. Communicate your employer brand from your website career page throughout the interview process to convince candidates that you are their best choice.

Remember that your current employees who are already culturally aligned may be your best candidates. Make it a priority to upskill and promote them. As you develop your recruiting strategy, remember that one bad attitude can negatively impact productivity and morale throughout your organization.

Step 2: Put your people first above everything else.

Think of employees as your internal customers and treat them with the same care and interest as you would your regular customers. Happy employees provide the highest-quality service. Putting people first creates positive, inspiring workplace communities that naturally tend toward empathy, compassion and well-being. This is what people expect from employers today. Don't let your community culture develop by default. Put your people at the center of every policy and practice to ensure your company becomes the irresistible place where people want to be.

Step 3: Think coach, not boss.

From CEO to supervisor, develop leaders who connect deeply with their people to build trusting relationships and healthy environments. Of course, you want leaders who exhibit competence and accountability. They must also model respect, empathy, transparency, collaboration and effective communication. Coaches have an ability to empower decision-making, encourage



innovation, recognize achievements and make work safe and fun. Effective leaders should be authentic, willing to be vulnerable and hesitant to judge. Great leaders today are human-centric, showing an abundance of soft skills which, by the way, can be learned.

Step 4: Listen first, then act.
With an effective recruiting process in place and a people-centric philosophy, the next step in your employee experience strategy is understanding your baseline. Ask current employees how they feel working in your company and what would make it even better for them. Include the perspectives and experiences of employees who are leaving.

Don't just listen. After employees have made the effort to share their thoughts, it is critical that you reflectively communicate. Employees will only share next time if they feel heard. Take action where it makes sense and provide feedback on the results of your actions. If you cannot act on employee suggestions, explain why it's not possible from a business perspective.

Communication reflects respect. Measure employee experience on a quarterly basis, at minimum. TinyPulse is an excellent tool that could give you real-time access to the data you need to drive a strategic employee experience improvement plan.

Step 5: Put people in the right roles.
Just as important as having the right people on board is making sure they are in the right roles. If people aren't inspired or challenged by their role, they will most likely consider leaving you for a more fulfilling employee experience elsewhere. Take time to understand employees' individual strengths, interests and goals and offer them opportunities for professional growth and advancement. Keep these three facts in mind:

1. The best people look for the best companies, which are those providing the most positive employee experience possible.
2. The reason that most employees leave boils down to this: You haven't put your people first.
3. The companies that succeed in finding and keeping the best people will gain a meaningful, competitive edge.

These are all reasons to make crafting a unique and compelling employee experience your top priority.

Kathleen Quinn Votaw is the founder and CEO of TalenTrust, a strategic recruiting and human capital consulting firm that has helped companies nationwide address immediate needs and drive long-term growth since 2003. She is the author of the 2016 book Solve the People Puzzle and the 2021 book Dare to Care in the Workplace. Visit talentrust.com.

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4 AVOIDABLE INSURANCE CLAIMS & 4 SOLUTIONS TO PREVENT THEM

With claims like these leading to rising premiums & fewer propane underwriters, it's time for marketers to take stock of safety protocols

BY FRANK THOMPSON

The insurance industry is facing its most difficult period in almost 40 years. Major property damage caused by fires, hurricanes and tornadoes are just a few of the issues the industry is currently dealing with. The same rampant inflation affecting you and me also affects the cost of rebuilding and the repair of vehicles. Perhaps most frightening are the nuclear claim verdicts being handed out, as the general public believes that the insurance industry has unlimited resources to pay these inflated claims.

The insurance industry's struggle to remain solvent in these turbulent times is not only affected by what goes on in the United States but also by what is happening on a global scale. In January 2023, it was reported that property reinsurance worldwide increased by up to 50% for the coming year. This will force property premiums to rise in 2023. In addition, some insurance companies reported substantial losses in the last two quarters of 2022.

Thirty years ago, when PT Risk Management started insuring propane marketers, there were only a few insurance carriers that were willing to write propane accounts.

Over the years, there have been many insurance companies that have started to write propane insurance and have not been able to afford the losses and withdrew. This article lists a few examples of "why."

EXAMPLE 1

A propane company filled a cylinder, which a customer placed in a camper. The camper exploded after the owner drilled out the heating orifices to make the flame hotter. The insurance company's claims manager maintained that their customer — the marketer — did nothing wrong when filling the cylinder. They turned down an offer from the plaintiff for the policy limit of $1 million. The jury awarded $50 million. That insurance carrier was forced to stop writing propane.

The Solution

The development and installation of overfilling prevention device valves in all barbeque-type cylinders, which stopped claims for overfilling.

EXAMPLE 2

A propane marketer purchased a competitor company and did nothing to advise the newly acquired clients what to do if they smelled propane. The

new owner assumed that the owner of the purchased company had already educated the customers. A bobtail driver for the company filled a tank, and it ran out of gas within two weeks. The couple that owned the house came home and, not knowing what to do, went down into the basement and turned on the lights. An explosion occurred, severely burning both of them.

At deposition, both parties testified that they did not know what to do when they smelled propane. They never checked the back of the delivery ticket to find the warning of what to do (or what not to do) when smelling propane.

That insurance carrier was not a member of the National Propane Gas Association and ended up being forced to educate their underwriters and claims personnel about propane.

The Solution

The development and standardization of "duty to warn" packets that should be sent to every customer at least once a year and provided to every new installation.

EXAMPLE 3

A propane company filled many cylinders in the course of a business day. They did not write out bills of sale with the customer's names or the serial numbers of the bottles. A bottle was incorrectly attached to a barbeque and an explosion occurred. The customer was burned and brought a suit against the closest propane company. There was no proof that the cylinder had been filled by that propane company, and the insurance company couldn't prove that they hadn't. The plaintiff won a large judgment against the propane company.

The Solution

Document every bottle filled with an invoice. Even if you just take a cellphone picture with a date stamp of the cylinder's serial number and upload to your system, that could at least prove that your company interacted with that particular bottle. Furthermore, document every cylinder sold to a customer. Don't sell anything without a written bill of sale.

EXAMPLE 4

A homeowner called his propane marketer and said he smelled propane. A service tech went out and performed a gas check. No leak was found. The homeowner called a second time, and the same service tech responded. A second gas check was performed — again, no leak was found. The home ultimately blew up. During the course of the investigation, the marketer was asked for the written gas check forms. They were nowhere to be found. No documented gas check forms were recorded. Why didn't the tech just shut off the tank? The marketer had no evidence to protect the company, so the insurance company was forced to pay a large judgment.



The Solution

Management needs to check to see that all gas check forms are in writing and signed.

CONCLUSION

When I hear of a propane claim that should not have happened, I get mad because it ripples throughout the insurance industry. First, it can cause senior management at the insurance companies to rethink writing for propane marketers. Second, it can cause the tightening of restrictions for the underwriters and, therefore, for all marketers. Third, and probably most important to you, it always causes premiums to increase across the board.

Propane marketers need to realize that they cannot sell propane to the public without insurance. The insurance companies that write propane accounts need to make a profit to continue to cover our industry. Insurance premiums will continue to increase if we don't focus on safety. Propane marketers need to utilize the safety tools available to them to help the insurance industry realize that marketers are fully complying with safety protocols.

- Duty to warn packets must be given to every customer annually and to each new customer upon installation.
- There must be written gas check forms on every customer and new installation.
- Out of gas calls are to be taken seriously; written gas check forms must be submitted and kept on file.
- Dispensers at non-owned locations need to have a written contract in place to be insured.
- Property values need to be reevaluated annually and adjusted based on current market conditions.
- Write out a receipt for every cylinder filled and keep track of the serial numbers of all bottles you touch.
- Save all renewable identification number (RIN) information.

> Premiums will continue to increase if we don't focus on safety.

- Modernize information collection so the tech has a written copy of the completed gas check form to give to the customer.

Frank Thompson is a chartered property and casualty underwriter based in Phoenix, Arizona. He is the owner of PT Risk Management, an independent insurance company specializing in writing propane and petroleum risk policies throughout the U.S. Visit ptrisk.com.



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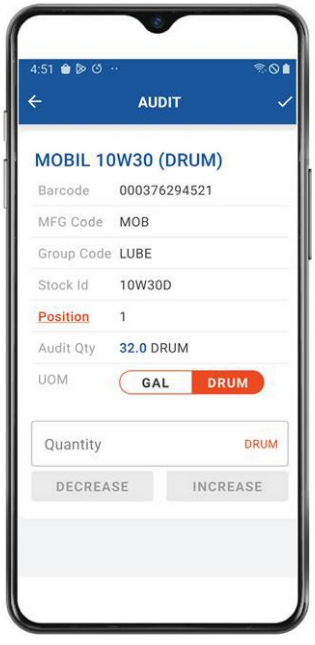


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advertiser index

Advertiser	Page
Alliance AutoGas	45
American Standard Mfg	46
Anova	IBC
BLT Tanks LLC	59
Blue Cow Software Inc	58
Cargas	27
Cavagna North America	13
ELAFLEX Pacific PTY LTD	21
Energy Distribution Partners	9
Energy Tech Solutions	57
Gray, Gray & Gray LLP	58
H&H Sales Company	40
ICOM North America	52
IPS Equipment Inc	16
Marshall Excelsior	20
Metsa Tanks	39
Mopeka Products	55
National Propane Gas Association	47
One-Tank	17
Otodata Inc	1
Propane Education & Research Council	5
Quality Steel Corporation	7
R.E. Michel	51
RegO Products/ECII	BC
ROUSH CleanTech	49
Suburban Propane	35
Superior Energy Systems	23
Teeco Products Inc	IFC
TerraVest Industries	3,32-33
Thieman Tailgates Inc.	54
TRIARC Tank	31
Westmor Industries LLC	43
Westport Fuel Systems.	57
Worthington Industries	41

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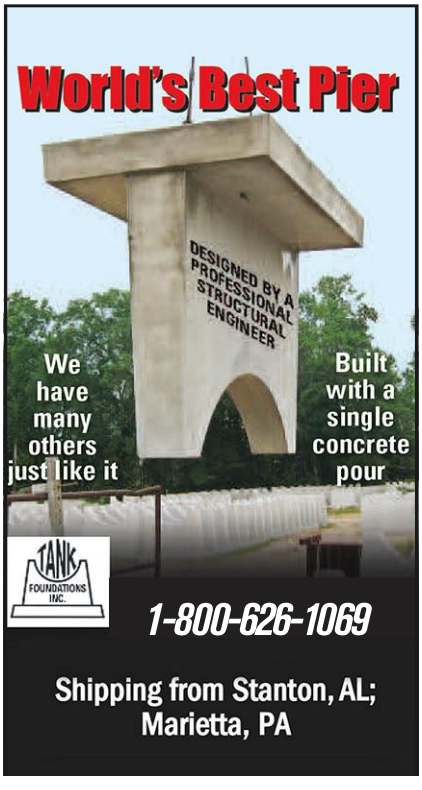
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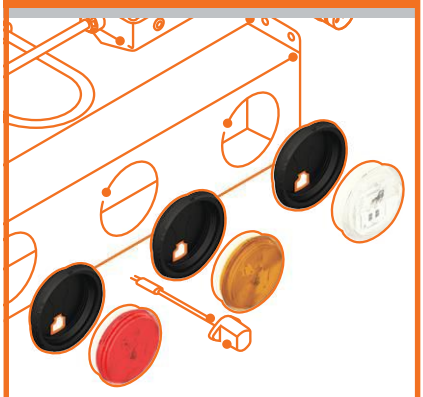
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Region Vice President — Northwest Energy Distribution Partners



Describe your current role at your company. I am responsible for all of Energy Distribution Partners' (EDP) Northwest regional operations and collaborate with my peers, senior management and field personnel on the development of company policy and standard operating procedures. I am a vigorous proponent of our company culture — including its vision, mission and values — and am focused on ensuring efficiency, safety and excellent customer service, as well as employee and community engagement. Of course, profitability is always a top priority and a part of every decision.

What is the biggest challenge the industry is facing right now? Electrification. As many states push toward net-zero emissions, propane has been pushed into a perceived less viable solution versus electricity and other energy sources. It will take an industry team effort to educate customers about their choices.

What inspires you about the industry currently? The potential for growth and outlook for propane in the coming years as customers become educated on the environmental benefits of using our product. In return, I believe this generates a promising career path for the next generation of propane industry professionals.

What's one thing you wish you knew earlier in your career that you know now? To not ignore the "Sunday night blues," or staying in a situation where I didn't look forward to work Monday morning. Life is about choices, and sometimes making the difficult choice to move on from whatever that situation might have been will end up being the best decision [long term]. Don't get stuck in that rut.

Name some of your greatest personal successes. Setting life goals and then moving the needle closer every day to achieving those goals. I try to start every day with a positive mindset. Sometimes terrible things happen in life, but there is always good as well. Try to focus on the good. This has helped me through some challenging times. But above all, one of my greatest personal successes is my relationship with my wife of nearly 29 years. We have a partnership that will last a lifetime.

> I try to start every day with a positive mindset. Sometimes terrible things happen in life, but there is always good as well.

What's something that not a lot of people know about you? I love the outdoors, including kayaking, paddleboarding, fishing, hiking, running, boulder climbing, exploring and just being in the wilderness in general.

How would you spend an unexpected day off? I would find an interesting place nearby that I have never been to before and experience it for the first time with my spouse, my daughters and my two-month-old grandson. I would try to enjoy every second of that day with the ones I love the most, making more special moments. I know it sounds cliché, but it's what I enjoy the most about my life … those moments. I can take them with me on my travels.

What required the most training for your role? Prioritization — I am very "hands on." I've done almost everything you can possibly do in this industry. As much as I still enjoy getting my hands dirty, I must make better use of my time. Prioritization is essential as I focus on what is important. Prioritizing means ensuring my team and I make the best use of our time.

What's a skill you'd like to improve on? Balance between my work and personal life.

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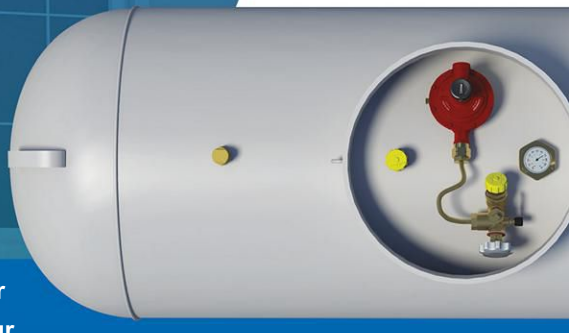
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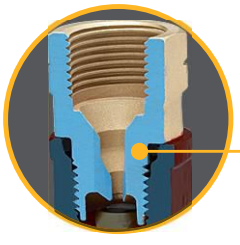
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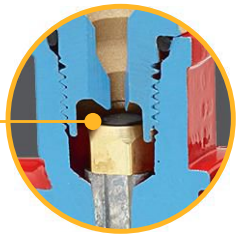


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