

FEBRUARY 2026

BUTANE-PROPANE NEWS

BPN

Taking Care of Business When Tank Challenges Flare Up

Comprehensive training & safety-driven responses mitigate the effects of potential propane tank accidents

+ SPECIAL SECTION
OFF THE GRID:
PROPANE IN REMOTE LOCATIONS

New! Marketer Spotlight: **Folger Gas**

Inside the Fall 2025 **Midwest & Mid-Atlantic Supply Disruptions**



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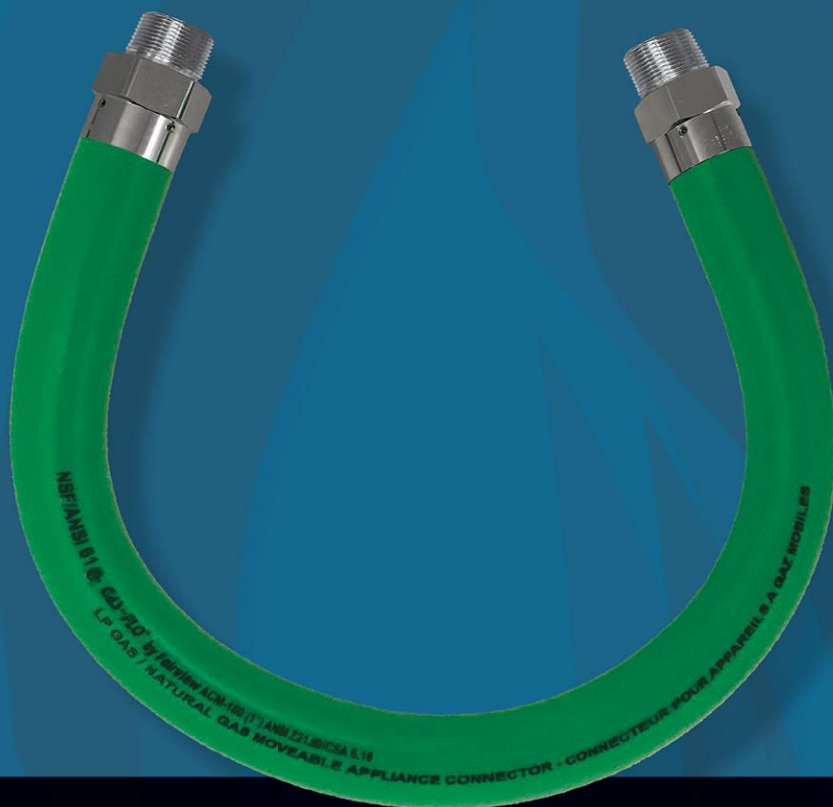
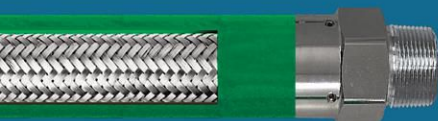
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Dear Readers,
If there's one thing you should know about the publishing world, it's that our work is never finished — meaning there is an ever-evolving conversation among our team members about new things we can try and ways we can continue improving the brand. That conversation also includes readers like you, and

one of the main requests we've heard over the years is the desire to hear from a wide variety of propane marketers.

To that end, this issue introduces our brand-new "Marketer Spotlight" category. We're excited to bring this to you in 2026 as a platform for marketers to share about their business — from company values to inspiring employee stories and the emphasis placed on the customer experience.

We've always intended for this magazine to be a valuable resource for running a propane business, whether that is keeping abreast of the latest news and regulatory and legislative updates or soaking up business advice from industry partners. With this new category, we give the spotlight to the marketers.

To kick things off, we're starting with Folger Gas LLC. Pete Folger, Folger Gas' managing member, answered several questions for us to learn more about the business and its philosophies. Check out what the Folger team is doing to take care of both its employees and its customers, as well as the philosophies they follow in business, on page 42.

The Marketer Spotlight will be a recurring section throughout the year and beyond, so we'd love to hear from you if this sparks your interest. Please contact bpneditorial@cahabamedia.com to connect with our team about being featured in a future issue.

Before I wrap this up, I want to highlight some additional topics you can read about this month. Starting on page 26, this issue's feature section focuses on propane tanks — from safety communication to accident prevention and response to the importance of tank coatings for compliance and performance.

We're also introducing a new special section called "Off the Grid: Propane in Remote Locations." The propane industry is no stranger to delivering propane in hard-to-reach areas and navigating the challenges that come along with it. On page 34, Valley Energy shares insights on communicating with customers about safety precautions so propane can be successfully delivered even in perilous conditions.

We hope you enjoy what this issue has to offer! I'm always open to new topics we can cover — email jphillips@cahabamedia.com with your ideas.

Until next time,

Jessica L. Phillips

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PROPANE TANK SERVICE AND INSTALLATION TRUCKS AND TRAILERS

February 2026



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Advanced coatings help propane tanks meet safety & regulatory requirements while improving durability & sustainability

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Careful communication with customers & safety precautions lead to successful propane delivery — even in perilous conditions



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Preparing for potential tank accidents includes preventive measures and emergency response training.

(Image courtesy of Propane Training Services)

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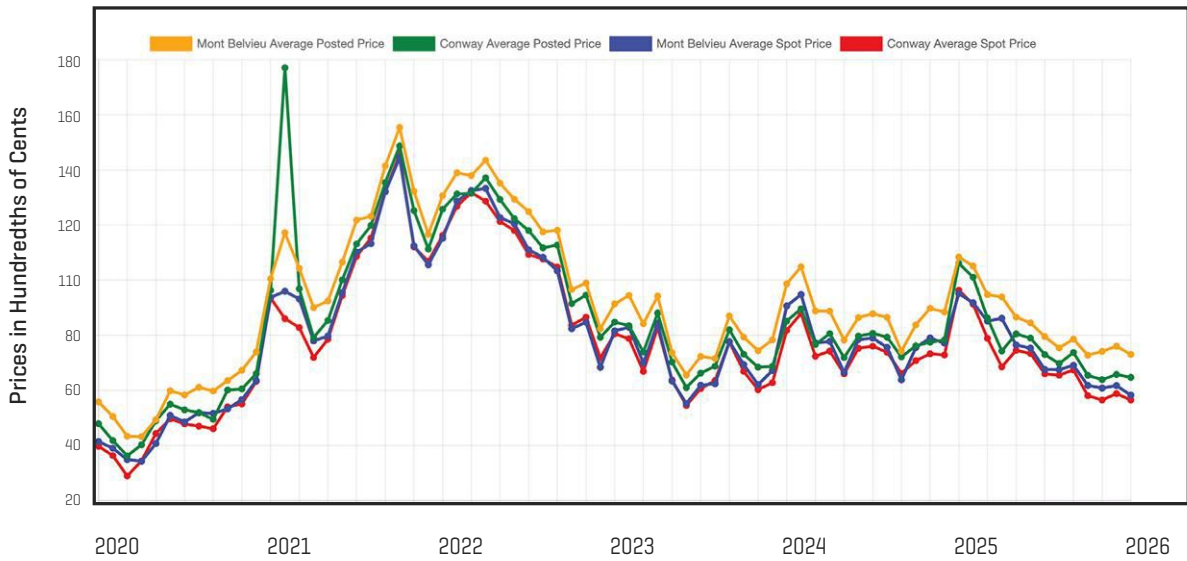


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MONT BELVIEU & CONWAY AVERAGE THURSDAY PROPANE PRICES



at a glance During the latest mid-month period, prices at Mont Belvieu, Texas, decreased. The posted prices decreased 3 cents/gal, from December mid-month to January mid-month, and spot prices decreased 3.625 cents. Conway, Kansas, postings decreased 1.06 cents/gal and spots decreased 2.125 cents over the month.

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

	12/18/25	12/23/25	01/02/26	01/08/26	01/15/26
Mont Belvieu					
posted	76.000	75.625	74.625	72.875	73.000
spot	61.500 – 61.875	61.625 – 62.250	58.625 – 69.250	58.750 – 59.125	57.875 – 58.625
Conway					
posted	65.745	66.245	65.995	64.310	64.685
spot	58.125 – 59.500	59.000 – 59.500	57.000 – 57.750	56.875 – 57.250	56.000 – 57.000

at a glance Canada’s primary underground propane inventories decreased by 3.8% in December, according to the Canada Energy Regulator [CER]. The total represented a month-to-month decrease of 59.1 Mcm. Compared to a year earlier, stocks were higher, with 25.9 Mcm, or 1.6%, less product on hand. *[Editor’s Note: Due to BPN’s publishing schedule, we’re sharing December inventory data from the CER.]*

CANADIAN INVENTORIES (Thousand Cubic Meters)

	Dec 2025	Nov 2025	Change	Dec 2024
PROPANE				
Propane-East	540.5	533.7	1.3%	515.9
Propane-West	961.2	1027.1	-6.4%	933.3
Total Propane	1501.7	1560.8	-3.8%	1449.2
BUTANE				
Butane-East	369.1	500.0	-26.2%	422.0
Butane-West	516.5	631.8	-18.3%	391.6
Total Butane	885.6	1131.8	-21.8%	813.7

Source: Canada Energy Regulator

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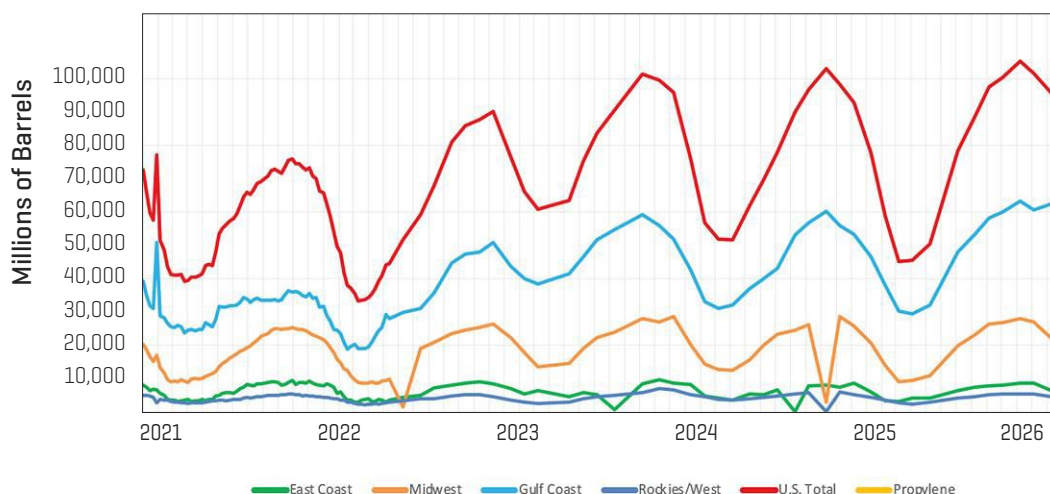


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U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES



at a glance

United States propane stocks experienced a 4.284-MMbbl decrease from December to January. East Coast stocks decreased 1.671 MMbbl, the Midwest decreased 3.63 MMbbl, the Gulf Coast increased 1.369 MMbbl, and the Rocky Mountain/West Coast decreased 352,000 bbl. Compared to the same time in January 2025, the January 2026 stocks were 17.863 MMbbl higher.

U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES

Dec. 12 – Jan. 9, 2026, and One Year Ago [Thousand Barrels]

	12/12/25	12/19/25	12/26/25	01/02/26	01/09/26	01/10/25
East Coast	7.999	8.011	7.733	6.809	6.328	5.954
Midwest	25.796	24.494	23.639	23.306	22.166	20.754
Gulf Coast	61.188	61.963	63.975	63.157	62.557	46.717
Rocky Mtn & West Coast	5.015	5.070	4.976	4.832	4.663	4.426
U.S.	99.998	99.539	100.324	98.104	95.714	77.851

U.S. RESIDENTIAL PROPANE PRICES

[Mid-Month, Cents per Gallon]

	Dec 2025	Jan 2025	Jan 2024
East Coast [PADD 1]	341.2	341.7	351.2
Midwest [PADD 2]	204.2	208.3	212.7
Average U.S.	253.0	255.8	262.9

Source: "Weekly Heating Oil and Propane Prices," Energy Information Administration

Find out more:

For commentary on mid-month prices and Canadian inventories, visit bpnews.com/news.



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JUDGE RULES MICHIGAN CANNOT SHUT DOWN LINE 5 PIPELINE

A federal judge ruled on Dec. 17, 2025, that Michigan does not have authority to shut down the Line 5 pipeline. The pipeline, which runs through the Straits of Mackinac, has experienced a number of safety challenges, including damage in multiple areas and a near rupture after being struck by a tugboat anchor in 2018. Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer ordered the pipeline shut down in 2020 due to the damage and the risk of spilling oil, and it has since faced many legal hurdles, including a 2020 lawsuit from pipeline owner Enbridge Energy. United States District Judge Robert Jonker ruled in this case to block the state from closing the pipeline, which the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) hailed as a “major legal victory” for the propane industry. Jonker’s order blocks the shutdown on the basis that pipeline safety and protection of the Straits “are critical interests to be sure. But when it comes to Line 5, they are the responsibility of the United States, and Michigan lacks the power to interfere.” As NPGA noted in a news release, efforts to shut down Line 5 would also “interfere with U.S. foreign affairs authority vested exclusively in the federal government.” Enbridge Energy also reports on its website that Line 5 “supplies 65% of propane demand in the Upper Peninsula and 55% of Michigan’s statewide propane needs,” making it a critical component of propane infrastructure in the region. In his decision, Jonker further stated that “Congress expressly preempted state regulation of interstate pipeline safety through the Pipeline Safety Act of 1992. Moreover, two sovereign nations — the United States and Canada — agree that Michigan’s attempt to shut down Line 5 interferes with their explicit federal foreign policy positions and trade relations.” The Michigan attorney general’s office is reviewing next steps following the ruling, including appeal.

TERRAVEST ACQUIRES KBK INDUSTRIES LLC

TerraVest Industries Inc. has acquired KBK Industries LLC, a Texas-based

manufacturer of fiberglass and steel storage tanks. Headquartered in Houston, Texas, with manufacturing facilities in Rush Center and Liberal, Kansas, KBK is a manufacturer of aboveground and underground fiberglass tanks for the c-store, agricultural, chemical, infrastructure and energy markets. KBK was acquired for \$90 million, subject to a working capital adjustment approximately 90 days post-closing. The purchase price represents a multiple of approximately 5.6x to KBK’s trailing 12-month EBITDA. John Jacob, president of Highland Tank Holdings Inc., welcomed the employees and management of KBK and said he looks forward to their continuing commitment to the company and dedication to their customers.

MID-JANUARY PROPANE PRICES DOWN FROM DECEMBER

During the latest mid-month period, prices at Mont Belvieu, Texas, decreased. The posted prices decreased 7.75 cents/gal from December mid-month to January mid-month, while spot prices decreased 7.625 cents. Conway, Kansas, postings decreased 7.275 cents/gal, and spots decreased 6.75 cents over the month.

Postings

The Mont Belvieu mid-December posted price was 80.75 cents/gal. The next week the price decreased 4.75 cents to 76 cents/gal, followed by a 0.375-cent decrease to 75.625 cents/gal. Postings decreased 1 cent to 74.625 cents/gal the first week of January. The following week, postings decreased 2.75 cents to 72.875 cents/gal. At mid-month, postings increased by 0.125 cents to 73 cents/gal. Compared to the same time in January 2025, the January 2026 prices were 35.397 cents lower. The Conway mid-December posted price was 71.96 cents/gal. The next week the price decreased 6.215 cents to 65.745 cents/gal, followed by a 1.5-cent increase to 66.245 cents/gal. Postings decreased 0.25 cents to 65.995 cent/gals the first week of January. The following week, postings decreased 1.685 cents to 64.31 cents/gal. At mid-month, postings increased 0.375 cents to 64.685 cents/gal. Compared to the same

time in January 2025, the January 2026 prices were 41.415 cents lower.

Spots

Mont Belvieu spots opened mid-December at 65.5 cents/gal. The next week the price decreased by 4 cents to 61.5 cents/gal, followed by a 0.125-cent increase to 61.625 cents/gal the next week. Spots decreased 3 cents to 58.625 cents/gal the first week of January. The following week, spots increased 0.125 cents to 58.75 cents/gal. At mid-month, they decreased 0.878 cents to 57.875 cents/gal. Compared to the same time in January 2025, the January 2026 prices were 36.875 cents lower. Conway spots opened mid-December at 62.75 cents/gal. The next week the price decreased 4.625 cents to 58.125 cents/gal, followed by a 0.875-cent increase to 59 cents/gal the next week. Spots decreased 2 cents to 57 cents/gal the first week of January. The following week, spots decreased 0.125 cents to 56.875 cents/gal. At mid-month, they decreased 0.875 cents to 56 cents/gal. Compared to the same time in January 2025, the January 2026 prices were 39.625 cents lower.

PERC LAUNCHES EVERY DAY SAFE PROGRAM TO STRENGTHEN INDUSTRY SAFETY CULTURE

The Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) has launched the Every Day Safe Program, a comprehensive new initiative designed to help propane companies strengthen their safety culture from the inside out. The program provides propane marketers with a simple framework to evaluate their current safety practices and develop a customized action plan. Recognizing that safety is the foundation of the propane industry, the Every Day Safe Program moves beyond simple compliance to foster a mindset where safety is part of a company’s identity. The program offers practical, easy-to-use tools to ensure teams remain focused, engaged and supported in their daily safety routines. Once enrolled, companies gain access to a full library of hands-on learning tools, including live webinars with experts, on-demand

eLearning courses and daily practice tools. These resources are built by and for the propane industry to reinforce the habits that keep people safe every day. Participating companies can also earn additional recognition by completing community-focused safety actions, such as hosting emergency response training with first responders or recognizing employees for safe behavior. To enroll in the program and access the Every Day Safe program hub, visit propane.com/everydaysafe.

EAST RIVER ENERGY ACQUIRES TRACEY ENERGY SERVICES

Cetane Associates announced that East River Energy Inc., based in Guilford, Connecticut, has acquired Tracey Energy Services LLC, located in New Haven, Connecticut. The transaction closed on Oct. 14, 2025. Tracey Energy was founded in 1931 by Erwin S. Tracey and originally provided range oil delivery. Over the decades, the company expanded under second- and third-generation leadership, growing through acquisitions and diversifying into HVAC and value-brand fuel offerings. Today, led by Jennifer Tracey-Carlo and Ralph Carlo, the third generation of the Tracey family leaves behind a legacy of exceptional service and innovation. Family-owned since 1984, East River Energy is a petroleum distributor across 13 states. They deliver heating oil and propane, as well as provide HVAC services to thousands of customers. Cetane served as the sole arranger for Tracey Energy. Cetane advised on the sale, including an initial valuation opinion, marketing the business through a confidential process, assisting in negotiating the final deal terms and coordinating the due diligence process.

WLGA ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2025 RELEASED

The World Liquid Gas Association (WLGA) released its “Annual Report” for 2025. The report highlights key global LPG trends and initiatives led by WLGA, including sustainable growth, innovation and safety for LPG use. “2025 is the third and last year of our 2023-2025 Strategic Plan,

which we launched in January 2023 under the theme of “Solutions for Sustainable Energy Transitions,” said James Rockall, CEO and managing director at WLGA.

“Please take a moment to read through this year’s Annual Report, which will give you an overview of the public work we do and also the work we undertake on behalf of our 300 members around the world.”

Key highlights of the report include:

- South and Central America account for 18.6% of all commercial demand
- Global demand at 366 million tonnes
- Global production at 370 million tonnes
- Asia-Pacific region accounts for 58.4% of global domestic demand

WLGA has held a consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 1989.

COLORADO’S NEW PROPANE EQUIPMENT NOX STANDARDS TAKE EFFECT IN 2026

Editor’s Note: The following news about Colorado propane NOx equipment standards first appeared in NPGA’s The Bobtail newsletter.

On Jan. 1, House Bill 23-1161 went into effect in Colorado. The legislation, which passed in 2023, seeks to reduce NOx emissions from gas furnaces and water heaters. However, the statute calls for the utilization of an emissions test that relies on protocols that were developed for natural gas products, not propane. This has created a compliance headache for manufacturers. As of the new year, retailers may not sell, lease or distribute noncompliant equipment in the state market (there is a grace period for products held in inventory before Jan. 1). Colorado propane NOx equipment standards:

- Water heaters with a rated heat input capacity < 75,000 Btus per hour and for any unit with power assist: 10 nanograms of NOx per joule
- Water heaters with a rated heat input capacity > 75,000 Btus and < 2 million Btus per hour: 14 nanograms of NOx per joule
- Fan-type central furnaces: 14 nanograms of NOx per joule

Tom Clark, executive director of the Colorado Propane Gas Association, has been engaging and seeking clarity from the Polis Administration on implementation of HB23-1161 for months. “This clarification was critical, and I’m glad we got it for members,” said Clark. “The statute unintentionally tied affected propane furnaces and water heaters to testing protocols created for natural gas equipment, creating an impossible compliance standard for propane manufacturers. While we are happy that state officials confirmed that propane products that are certified to the most recent version of the federal Energy Star Program are automatically deemed to comply with the new emission limits, we need to work with the legislature to ensure that all propane products in the market remain available to Colorado consumers.” As of the 2024 industry sales report, Colorado is the 18th-largest propane market in the country, with 186 million gallons sold. For more information, contact NPGA’s senior director of state advocacy & affairs, Jacob Peterson.

RELIABLE ENERGY PARTNERS HIRES 2 LEADERSHIP TEAM MEMBERS

Reliable Energy Partners announced the additions of Johnny Maddox and Todd Tanis to its leadership team. Johnny Maddox joins Reliable Energy as chief operating officer, bringing a track record spanning 25 years. He has extensive experience overseeing large-scale operations, driving organizational growth and fostering a culture of safety and efficiency. Todd Tanis joins Reliable Energy as vice president of operations, with over 20 years of operational leadership experience, including 13 years dedicated to the propane industry. Tanis will play a crucial role in driving operational best practices at all of Reliable Energy’s partner companies. Founded by Soundcore in November 2025, Reliable Energy has focused on building a strong regional presence by integrating its portfolio companies and streamlining operations to deliver value to its customers. Reliable Energy completed four acquisitions in 2025. 📌

Industry Calendar

Feb. 24-26 Minnesota Propane Association Annual Meeting
mnpropane.org
Bloomington, MN

March 2 Louisiana PGA Board Meeting
lapropane.org
TBD

March 2-4 NPGA Spring Technology, Standards & Safety Committee Meeting
npga.org
Tucson, AZ

March 3-4 Texas PGA Board & Committee Meeting
txpropane.com
Kerrville, TX

March 4 Propane Marketers Association of Kansas Board Meeting
pmak.org
Topeka, KS

March 4-5 Tennessee Capitol Day & Membership Meeting
tngas.org
Nashville, TN

March 5 Wisconsin PGA Board Meeting
wipga.org
Sheboygan, WI

March 5 Alabama PGA Committee & Board Meeting
alabamapropane.com
Prattville, AL

March 5 Oklahoma PGA Board Meeting
okpropane.org
Oklahoma City, OK

March 10-11 Colorado PGA Spring Membership Meeting
copropane.com
Golden, CO

March 11 Western PGA Capitol Day
westernnpga.org
Sacramento, CA

March 11-12 Arkansas PGA Board Meeting
arkansaspropane.com
Mountain Harbor, AR

March 12-13 NPGA Spring Benchmarking Meeting
npga.org
Long Beach, CA

April 19-21 2026 NPGA Southeastern & International Propane Expo
npga.org
Nashville, TN

May 17-20 Eastern Energy Expo
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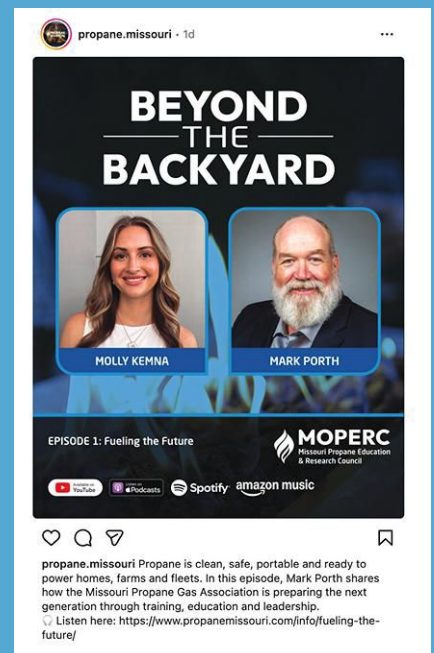
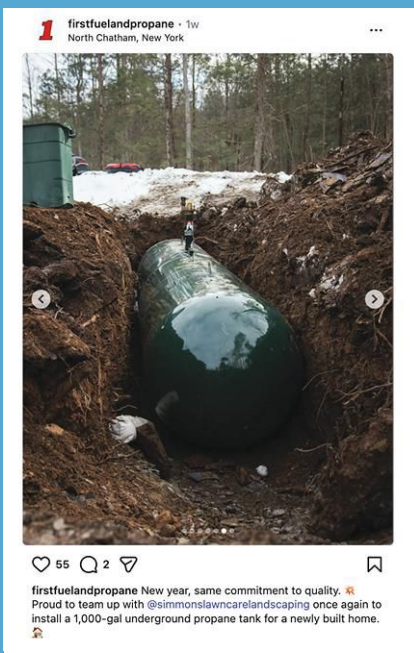
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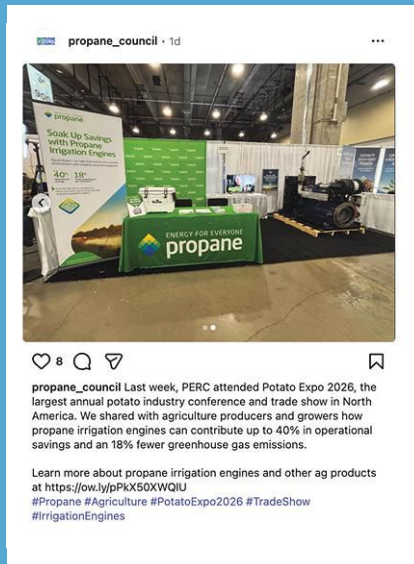
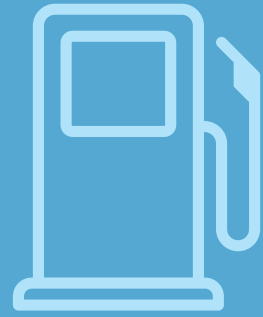
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THE FUELING STATION

The cold weather isn't keeping the propane industry from going "all gas, no brakes." As the snowy season increases demand for propane, the industry has kept busy providing essential heating to customers — and having some fun along the way. From spotting bald eagles in frigid environments to representing the unique benefits of propane at the largest potato industry conference in North America, check out the latest buzz in the propane industry from recent weeks.





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congerlpgas HUGE ANNOUNCEMENT:

We are so excited to share that we have opened a new office in Douglas, Georgia!

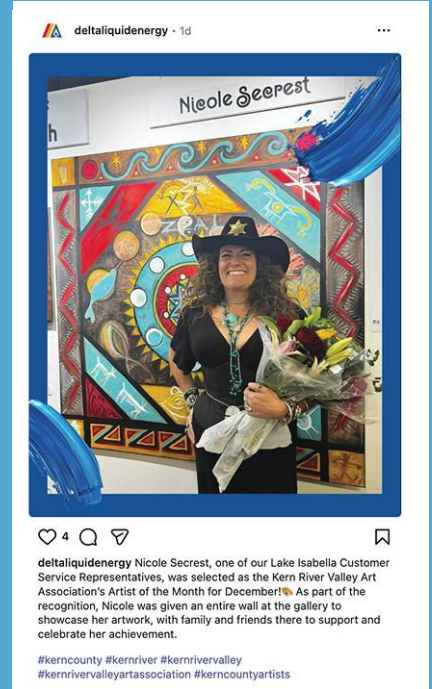
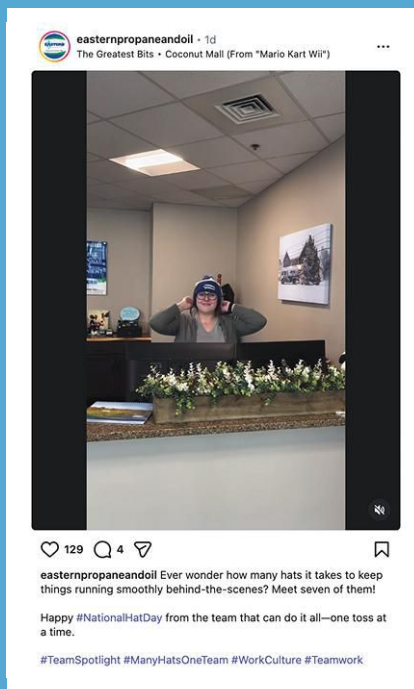
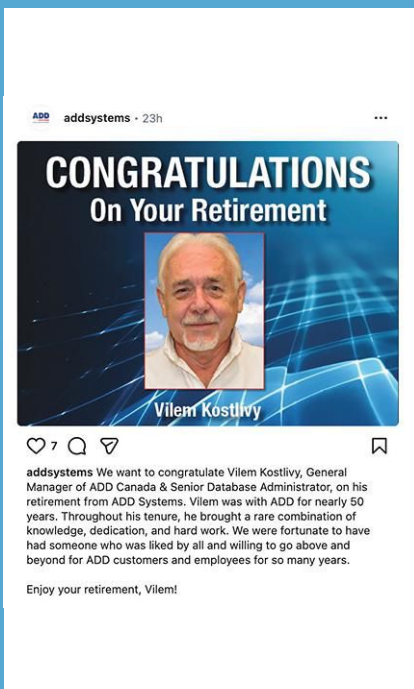
Your new local propane provider is here—bringing hometown service, a great selection of appliances, and a team that knows the community. We're excited to serve Douglas and the surrounding area!

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Whitney Parsley is an associate at the M&A advisory firm Cetane Associates and specializes in M&A and corporate governance. Learn more at cetane.com. Contact Parsley at wparsley@cetane.com.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS MEAN TO YOU & HAS YOUR DEFINITION OF IT CHANGED OVER TIME?

Life experience encourages shifting ideas of success — at work & at home

This month's question was intentionally chosen with growth and more reflection in mind. Based on the thoughtful and candid responses from our colleagues, one clear theme emerged: Success is not a fixed destination, but an ever-evolving concept that changes as we grow throughout our lives.

As we move through the different seasons of life, gain new experiences and encounter both challenges and achievements, our priorities will naturally shift.

With that growth comes a redefinition of what success looks like to each of us. This evolution is not only inevitable, but healthy, reflecting greater self-awareness, maturity and alignment with what truly matters at each stage of our lives.

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. Enjoy!

SUCCESS PERSONALLY DEFINED

The meaning of success has changed a few times in my life. Some of my accomplishments I consider successful. Being the first in my family to graduate from college, raising a family, earning a master's degree and enjoying a good career are some of them. As I grow older with more life experience, my idea of success has become something else. Success to me is doing everything I can do to be a good person and good at business. I am blessed to have an amazing family and friends — people I can count on and be a positive influence in their lives. In my music journey, my

goal is to make people feel good when I perform. In my career, I have created lifelong friendships and have gained respect from so many people. To me, that is more important than anything else.

ED VARNEY
TOPLINE MANAGEMENT
MCKINNEY, TEXAS

Success to me is setting my mind to something and seeing it through. Over time, my definition of success has evolved, sometimes changing by the minute! On some days, success is staying calm with my teenage kid. On

'I am blessed to have an amazing family & friends ... In my career, I have created lifelong friendships & have gained respect from so many people. To me, that is more important than anything else.'



other days, it might involve tackling a larger project that takes multiple days to complete. And then there are those particularly challenging days where success might simply be folding laundry. The key, I believe, is not to be too hard on ourselves. We're all human, trying our best, and some days' best might look a little different.

ABBY THURSTON
RURAL COMPUTER CONSULTANTS
BIRD ISLAND, MINNESOTA

I measure success by asking myself a simple question: Would a younger version of me be proud of this? As I've gotten older and achieved more, my definition of success has evolved. I tend to raise the bar quickly and move on to the next goal without fully celebrating the milestone I just reached. That's why I try to slow down and reflect, imagining how excited my younger self would be to hear about where I am today. I also measure success by the happiness of the

people who matter most to me, including my husband, my kids, my colleagues and our customers. If they're doing well, that feels like real success to me.

STACI RAMMEL
WOODRUFF ENERGY
BRIDGETON, NEW JERSEY

I remember reading a motivational poster that had an impact on me. I don't remember the exact words, but basically it said that success is not about money, it is about the difference you make in other people's lives. In my younger days it was about money in the bank, the house I lived in, the vacations I took or the promotions at work. As I have gotten older, success to me is being kind to people and staying happy every day.

STEVE ABBATE
CETANE ASSOCIATES
KENT, CONNECTICUT

My idea of success would be in my

children and grandchildren. We are growing up in very difficult times where everything you do and say is judged. If when I'm gone, and the Lord takes me home, I want to know that my children can stand on their own, support themselves and be strong enough to support their views. If they are a success in life, then my life has been a success.

JUDY TARANOVICH
PROCTOR GAS INC.
PROCTOR, VERMONT

PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS DEFINED

My opinion of success has certainly changed over time. Early on in my career, promotions and financial gains were certainly at the top of the list as a measure of success. I would say once I got to my 50s, that changed, and family and happiness — doing what I was doing — became more important than those previous items. Things have turned out well, but that's probably more because my wife kept the family together and on

a good path, while I was chasing something not as important. Would I do things differently? Yes, but am still fortunate that things worked out the way they have. I think as we get older, maybe we become wiser or maybe it's just learning from our mistakes, but I certainly wish I knew what I know now earlier in my career.

TOM KRUPA
NGL SUPPLY TERMINALS CO.
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

SUCCESS IS A JOURNEY

As we continue to grow and evolve across our professional, personal and financial lives, it becomes increasingly important to recognize that the way we define and measure success evolves right alongside us. Success is not a static milestone to be reached once and left behind; rather, it is a dynamic and ongoing pursuit that shifts as we navigate life's inevitable

'I measure success by asking myself a simple question: Would a younger version of me be proud of this?'

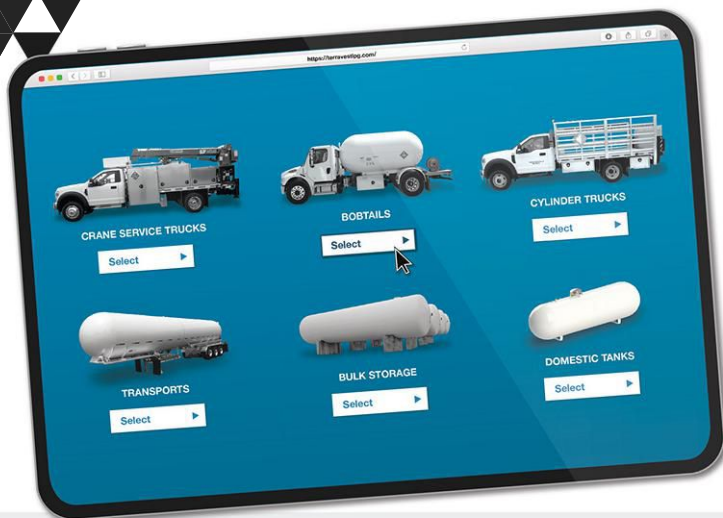
highs and lows. When we allow ourselves to view success as an ever-changing goal, one shaped by experience, perspective and growth, we open the door to countless opportunities to succeed in meaningful ways along the journey.

As we move further into 2026, many of us are setting intentions and goals aimed at improving our lives, strengthening

our circumstances, supporting our families and becoming the best versions of ourselves. By resisting the urge to lock ourselves into a single, rigid definition of what success must look like, we give ourselves the freedom to recognize and celebrate progress in all its forms. In doing so, we not only continue to achieve success, but also learn to enjoy life as it unfolds.

By staying present in the moment while remaining open to what lies ahead, we position ourselves to fully and successfully embrace all that life has to offer. 🍷

If you're interested in contributing responses to future Verbatim columns, please contact Parsley at wparsley@cetane.com.



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David Schlee is an attorney practicing in Kansas City, Missouri. He has been representing propane and natural gas distributors in fire and explosion litigation since 1986 and has authored BPN's Propane & the Law column since September 1989. He can be reached at dschlee@dschleelaw.com.

VERMONT COURT SIDES WITH PROPANE RETAILER IN COLLECTION CASE

A Vermont court case shows how a well-drafted customer agreement can protect propane retailers when unpaid balances escalate into litigation

In a perfect world, every propane customer would pay their bill on time. In the real world, this does not always happen. When a customer is delinquent, the retail distributor will turn to various collection efforts. Fortunately, most problems are resolved without the need for a lawsuit. But when litigation is necessary, the retailer's best friend is a solid customer agreement. A recent example arose early last year in Vermont. The case is *Bourne's Inc. v. Lemelson*.

MULTIPLE ACCOUNTS

In July 2016, the Rev. Emmanuel Lemelson, an ordained Orthodox priest, contracted with Bourne's Energy, a retail propane distributor with six locations in northern Vermont, to provide heating oil to one of the buildings on Lemelson's property in Stowe, Vermont. Propane was also to be provided to a swimming pool heater located on the same property. Lemelson was billed by Bourne's under two separate accounts, one for the heating oil and the other for the propane for the pool.

Lemelson had signed an "Application for Fuel Delivery and Service," which stated he was to pay all invoices within

30 days, with a 1.5% finance charge to be added to unpaid balances. In addition, Bourne's was entitled to all reasonable collection costs, including attorney fees.

UNPAID BALANCES

In February 2017, Lemelson added a third account to supply propane for a chapel he had constructed on his property. Bourne's did not require a new application for this account, instead merely noting on the original application that it was adding a third account for the chapel.

For the next three years, Bourne's regularly supplied heating oil and propane to the Lemelson property. Lemelson carried an unpaid balance on each of the accounts for nearly every month they were active. Bourne's applied a 1.5% finance charge every month on the outstanding unpaid balance on each account. Lemelson never objected that the finance charges were outside the scope of the parties' agreement.

TERMINATION OF ACCOUNTS

In June 2019, Bourne's became concerned with the large balances Lemelson was carrying and decided to end his credit

and put future deliveries on a cash-in-advance and call-for status. Lemelson found this unacceptable and terminated his accounts with Bourne's as of January 2020. At that time, he owed \$825.94 on the pool propane account, \$4,935.42 on the home heating-oil account and \$933.61 on the chapel propane account.

Bourne's owned the propane tanks used by Lemelson. Ordinarily, when a customer terminates a contract with a supplier, the supplier will remove the tanks. However, when the tanks are underground, as they were in this case, it is a common industry practice for suppliers to trade tanks with the customer's new supplier. Bourne's attempted to learn the name of Lemelson's new propane provider, but he refused to disclose it.

REMOVING THE TANKS

In February 2020, Lemelson formally requested that Bourne's remove the propane tanks from his property. Bourne's advised that it would be unable to do so until April 2020, when the weather would allow for excavation. Lemelson agreed to this date, but he also told Bourne's that its personnel were



not allowed to enter his property until further notice.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unexpected delays, and by June 2020, the tanks were still on the Lemelson property. (Bourne's had promised to remove them in April 2020.) When Bourne's was unable to comply with a June 17 demand that it remove the tanks by the following day, Lemelson had one of the tanks excavated and placed at the front of his property where Bourne's later collected it. The parties continued to disagree about the second and third tanks, and in October 2020, Lemelson had those excavated as well.

LAWSUIT & COUNTERCLAIM

Bourne's then sued Lemelson, who claimed he was not subject to the terms of the 2016 agreement because he did not fill out separate applications for each of his accounts. After a hearing, the court rejected this defense and concluded that Lemelson owed a total of \$9,450.82 for the three accounts as of June 2023. It did, however, find that Lemelson was entitled to an offset of the finance charges accrued from April to November 2020, when the tanks remained on the Lemelson property after Bourne's

promised to remove them. This reduced the judgment to \$8,747.85.

Lemelson had filed a counterclaim, asserting that Bourne's had violated the Vermont Consumer Fraud Rule and the Vermont Consumer Protection Act, and that he was entitled to substantial damages under these statutes because Bourne's allegedly failed to promptly remove the tanks and to provide a refund for the unused propane. The court rejected these claims. It found that the Consumer Fraud Rule requiring removal of a propane tank within 20 to 30 days did not apply when the tank could not be removed due to weather or issues of access. It also found that Lemelson had been credited for the unused propane as part of the court's judgment.

ATTORNEY'S FEES

Finally, unfortunately for Lemelson, the court concluded that, in addition to the \$8,747.85 judgment, Bourne's was entitled to attorney's fees under the terms of the agreement. Following a hearing in May 2024, the court awarded Bourne's \$39,056 in attorney fees and \$6,694 in costs.

Lemelson appealed to the Vermont Supreme Court. He challenged the trial court's findings that (1) the agreement

he signed in 2016 applied to all three accounts; (2) he did not object to the finance charges prior to 2020; (3) unused propane credits or credit for the tanks were applied to the account; and (4) Bourne's did not act in bad faith in failing to promptly remove the tanks. However, the court found there was substantial evidence to support each of these findings, and it rejected these challenges.

WEATHER & ACCESS ISSUES

Lemelson invoked a Vermont regulation requiring removal of a propane tank from customer property within 30 days of the termination of service. However, the court found that this regulation was not violated by Bourne's:

"Although plaintiff did not remove the tanks within 30 days of defendant's February 2020 request, plaintiff provided evidence that weather and access issues prevented it from doing so until June and October, respectively. We therefore affirm the court's conclusion."

Finally, Lemelson challenged the trial court's award of attorney fees and costs. The Supreme Court found the trial court's analysis on this point to be reasonable, and it affirmed the award. 📌



Johnny Nickel is managing editor for Butane-Propane News.

INSIDE THE NOVEMBER 2025 MIDWEST & MID-ATLANTIC SUPPLY DISRUPTIONS

2 separate incidents involving the Mid-America Pipeline & Marcus Hook Terminal reveal the importance of the propane sector's industry associations

BY JOHNNY NICKEL

In November 2025, the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic regions encountered two separate incidents involving pipelines operated by Enterprise Products and Energy Transfer Products respectively. The Mid-America Pipeline, operated by Enterprise Products, experienced a leak in Kansas on Nov. 27, and was soon repaired on Dec. 3.

At the Energy Transfer Partners-operated Marcus Hook Terminal, an electric transformer disabled the site's propane truck-loading rack for three days and created enduring problems that impacted Energy Transfer's ability to pump propane properly.

Supply issues are a challenge to manage during any time of the year, but this is especially true during the industry's busy cold months. To learn more about these disruptions — and the resources available to propane suppliers — BPN reached out to J.D. Buss, president of Westlark Advisors.

Additionally, in a special Q&A section, readers can hear from Benjamin Nussdorf, senior vice president of regulatory and industry affairs at the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA), on how NPGA provided immediate and ongoing support in the wake of these challenges.

Buss: Two of the major logistical issues impacting supply this winter, Marcus Hook and the Mid-America Pipeline, have already been discussed in many news outlets. What may be more impactful at this juncture will be to discuss some of the impact and how to manage these — and other types — of logistical challenges.

Reduced terminal access at Marcus Hook and disruptions on the Mid-America Pipeline impacted most of December and early January for the Eastern and Midwest regions of the country. Some of the results of these items were higher spot supply prices within the region and elevated rail prices at origin points as far away as Alberta, Canada. These were also contributing factors to hours-of-service waivers and stretching transportation assets across a large section of the Eastern U.S. Finally, terminals in different regions also saw an increase in traffic as distributors sourced some product from hundreds of miles away.

We call these logistical challenges because North America is currently awash in propane. However, that propane mainly exists in locations meant to serve the international markets, not the domestic markets. This shift

in product placement over the past 10-12 years forces distributors to make different choices.

One of those choices is to invest in additional storage. This could take the form of an additional bulk tank, transport assets, purchasing third-party underground storage capacity and even increasing the number of tank monitors in the field. All of these choices can expand a distributor's asset reach and allow them to ultimately have more propane available when needed.

THE ROLE OF INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS

Buss: By the time this article prints, the two major logistical challenges for the U.S. this winter will be resolved — resolved through repairs, allocation practices and distributors simply buying from other locations. But another key part of resolving these challenges is both the regional and national efforts of our industry associations.

Hours-of-service waivers have been vital this winter (as in many past winters) to allow transports more time to secure product and deliver to distributors. Regional associations help communicate this need to the states while NPGA assists with communication to the Federal



Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) to secure broader waivers.

When this winter rests in the rearview mirror, there will come many questions about how to avoid these challenges in the future. My advice: You cannot prevent every challenge. In fact, every year it seems the challenges change. So, what can you do?

PREPARING FOR EVER-CHANGING SUPPLY CHALLENGES

Buss: Invest in the infrastructure of your business. This could take the form of storage tanks, trucks, more personnel, tank monitors, analytical software and more. Expanding a distributor's storage and improving efficiency are great ways to prepare for winter logistical challenges.

From a supply standpoint, we would also encourage each distributor to make sure they have a diversified supply portfolio. Diversification in locations, suppliers, modes of delivery and more will provide another strategy for distributors to better weather some of the unexpected future challenges.

Logistical challenges will always exist. Investing in your company's own infrastructure and being flexible to modify your plans will help you 'weather' these challenges in the future.

NPGA Q&A

1. Can you give some background info on the recent supply disruptions?

Nussdorf: Enterprise's Mid-America Pipeline encountered a leak in Kansas, affecting the eastern leg of the system. The repair of the pipeline was fixed within a week and was in operation two days following repairs due to delays with inspections from the Office of Pipeline Safety from the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Administration. The eastern leg of the pipeline was on allocation through the month of December. Energy Transfer Partners' terminal at Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania, suffered an electric incident, leading to the impairment of pumps moving propane from storage at the facility to its propane truck-loading rack. [At the time of publication], the incident has yet to be fully repaired. The terminal declared force majeure and is on allocation and is loading propane directly from the pipeline, which pumps at a lower pressure. The truck rack is unavailable at certain times of day, which the terminal publishes. The problem remains at issue with no resolution date known. The result of both incidents are significant supply disruptions in the Midwest as well as the Mid-Atlantic — and as a

consequence of winter weather, New England.

2. What resources are available for suppliers & marketers when the supply chain is disrupted, especially during cold months?

Nussdorf: Suppliers and marketers can shift to alternate supply points along the pipelines, utilize rail resources or source propane from greater distances. FMCSA authorized a two-week emergency regional waiver, which began on Dec. 12, 2025, and ran through Dec. 26, providing hours-of-service relief to suppliers and marketers who use trucking to help address their needs. The waiver was extended on Dec. 23 and ran until Jan. 15, and included 19 states in the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest.

3. How did NPGA respond to these disruptions? What processes & organizations have helped with resolution?

Nussdorf: NPGA has been in regular contact with Enterprise and the Department of Transportation on both disruptions since they occurred. NPGA led the efforts to get an emergency regional waiver and continues to provide updates to FMCSA daily. NPGA also is in touch with state leaders, suppliers and

marketers regarding conditions and inventory. NPGA has also been in touch with railroads about supplementing supply.

4. Are there any regulatory issues or standards the industry needs to keep top of mind when it comes to supply disruptions & emergencies?

Nussdorf: The industry should be mindful of hours-of-service regulations from FMCSA, as well as pipeline safety regulations from the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration.

5. Are there any short-term or long-term repercussions the industry should be aware of in light of these disruptions?

Nussdorf: The industry should be mindful of loading times and delays at pipelines and attempt to schedule their pickups at times of diminished demand. NPGA will continue to work

with the industry, pipelines, railroads and the federal government to minimize disruptions to operations.

6. How does NPGA prepare in advance for supply disruptions? What strategies & tools can people use to minimize supply chain disturbances?

Nussdorf: NPGA's Supply and Logistics Committee meets frequently and engages with pipelines and railroads to provide transparency and address issues of supply disruptions. NPGA hires outside consultants to review supply conditions. NPGA also regularly works with state and federal leaders to educate them about supply and logistics challenges. Suppliers and marketers can provide data to NPGA, such as pipeline disruptions, trucking challenges such as significant lines at terminals, missed rail switches and number of cars missed per switch, and storage concerns. All of this data is essential in communicating concerns to state and federal leaders.

7. What is the role of communication during events like this? Are there any ways the industry can improve in communicating when things like this occur?

Nussdorf: Effective communication is essential. We encourage you to contact your state or regional leadership, or NPGA's State Affairs team, with particular concerns. Without your communications, we lack on-the-ground knowledge, which we would like to be able to share with regulators who can manage supply and logistics regulations.

8. Is there anything else you'd like to share with our readers?

Nussdorf: We greatly appreciate the efforts of NPGA's Supply and Logistics Committee. If you are interested in participating in order to play an active role to address the industry's concerns in this area, please reach out to Christine Hutcherson at chutcherson@npga.org.

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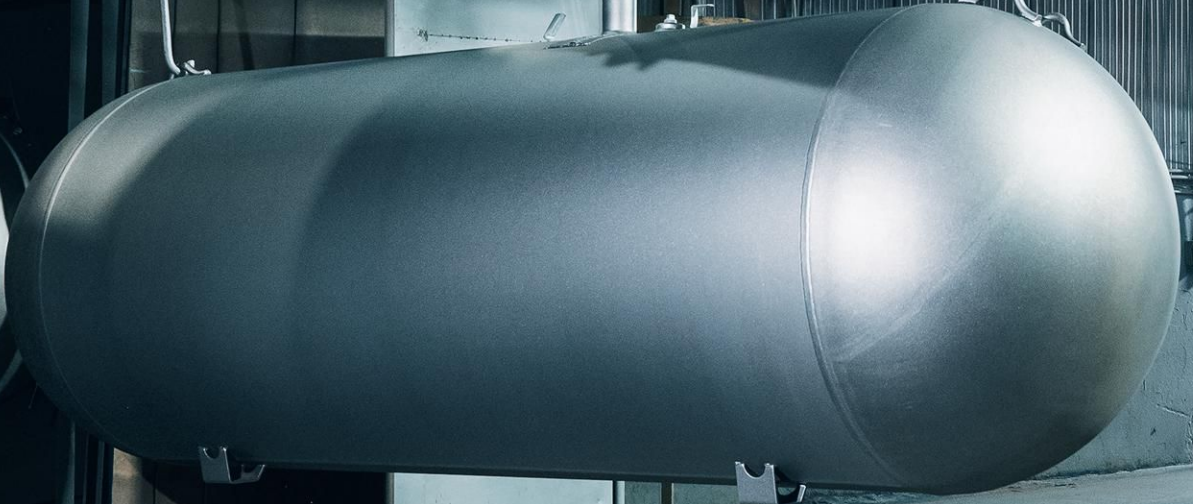


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PROPANE SAFETY IS BUILT ON **COMMUNICATION**

Your customers play an essential role
in mitigating risks with tanks & beyond

BY MICHELLE BIMSON MAGGI

Propane is a safe, efficient and dependable energy source used by millions of homes and businesses every day. Its strong safety record is not accidental. It is the result of well-designed systems, professional installation and service, and informed customers. Clear and consistent communication about propane safety plays a critical role in ensuring propane continues to be used safely and responsibly.

For the past two decades, I have been investigating propane incidents from both a safety and legal perspective, and I have seen firsthand how critical customer safety communication can be. Many of the incidents I have reviewed did not involve defective equipment or improper installations. Instead, they were often traced back to uninformed customers.

Those customers, for example, included those who did not recognize the smell of propane, were unaware of what to do after a service interruption, or attempted to fix or restart equipment on their own, which resulted in significant events. In several cases, a brief conversation, a clear written notice or a seasonal reminder could have prevented the incident entirely.

PROVIDERS & CUSTOMERS SHARE A SAFETY RESPONSIBILITY

These experiences have reinforced that propane safety is a shared responsibility between propane companies and our customers. While trained technicians install, inspect and maintain propane tanks and systems, customers interact with those every day. They operate appliances, use outdoor equipment and are often the first to notice something unusual. When customers understand how propane systems work and know the warning signs, potential problems can be addressed before they escalate.

Effective safety communication helps prevent incidents before they happen. During investigations, I have repeatedly seen situations where customers did

not intend to do anything unsafe, but their action or inaction resulted in an incident. Clear guidance on customer responsibilities and what the propane company provides is essential. In addition, industry resources, such as those provided by the Propane Education & Research Council, help establish a consistent baseline through customer-friendly videos, brochures and educational materials.

EMERGENCY EVENTS

Communication becomes even more critical during emergency situations. In cases involving suspected leaks, the difference between a close call and a serious incident often came down to how a customer responded in the first few moments. Customers who had been properly educated understood how important it is to leave the area immediately, avoid ignition sources and contact their propane provider or emergency services from a safe location. Those who have not received that education may hesitate, disregard the risk or take actions that increase the risk.

Ongoing safety communication also builds trust and confidence. I have seen how documented, consistent customer communication demonstrates a company's commitment to safety. Customers who feel informed and supported are more engaged, more willing to follow safety guidance and more likely to reach out to you with questions before a small issue becomes a major problem.

SHIFTING SEASONS

Propane safety needs also change with the seasons. Winter weather introduces risks related to snow and ice buildup around tanks and regulators, while warmer months bring increased use of grills and outdoor appliances. Power outages, flooding and severe weather events add additional variables. Proactive seasonal communication helps customers understand these risks before

conditions arise, rather than after an incident occurs.

Clear safety messaging also supports compliance with industry standards and best practices. When customers understand why certain procedures are required, such as leak checks after service interruptions or maintaining proper clearances around tanks, they are more likely to cooperate and see safety requirements as protections rather than inconveniences.

A strong safety culture is built through repetition and consistency. In my experience, safety communication should never be a one-time conversation. It must be reinforced through ongoing reminders and education so safe behavior becomes routine rather than reactive.

Ultimately, effective communication about propane tank and gas system safety protects everyone involved. It protects customers and their families, supports drivers and service technicians in the field and strengthens the propane companies that serve their communities. Based on what I have seen through years of incident investigations, clear communication is not optional; it is foundational in keeping propane safe, trusted and reliable. ▀

Michelle Bimson Maggi is vice president — corporate affairs for Ferrellgas, the country's second-largest propane marketer. In her current role, Bimson Maggi serves as a key member of the Ferrellgas senior executive management team, where she leads Ferrellgas' Public Affairs and Investor Relations, building strong relationships with policymakers and external stakeholders to support strategic goals. She is responsible for federal and state legislative matters, government and industry affairs, and advocacy efforts that advance both Ferrellgas' and industry priorities. She also oversees the company's safety, risk and communications functions, championing a culture of trust, transparency and continuous improvement. Visit ferrellgas.com.



UNDERGROUND PROPANE TANK ACCIDENT PREVENTION

Proper training on tank installation, leak mitigation & leak response leads to safer outcomes for homeowners & propane employees alike

BY CARL WEEKS

Carl Weeks (far left) works with a fire department in Hawaii on tank flare training. Images courtesy of Weeks.

In his article in BPN's September 2025 issue titled "Virginia Jury Convicts Propane Service Manager of Manslaughter," attorney David Schlee highlighted a disturbing legal case involving an underground 500-gallon propane tank home explosion in Sterling, Virginia. Schlee's article made it more clear than ever that propane companies must ensure employees adhere to internal policies and procedures, tank manufacturer instructions and national, state and local codes. As owner of and instructor for Propane Training Services, I've had years of experience with underground tanks. The following article can serve as a guide on the topic of underground tank accident prevention based on my and others' experience.

WHAT TO DO BEFORE, DURING & AFTER TANK INSTALLATION

To begin, soil boring tests before purchase and installation on commercial land can prevent future headaches and major costs. Are you familiar with the property's history and any

undisclosed waste, chemical saturation or past dumping of hazardous material? Reference any geographical maps for flood zones and potential saltwater incursion, chemical treatment and soil conditions.

Department of Transportation (DOT) cylinders or American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) bulk tanks have no self-determined shelf life. Yes, DOT cylinders require periodic requalification and are allowed for aboveground use only, and underground ASME tanks must have cathodic protection; however, their life expectancy will be determined by the company performing the containers' preparation and installation. Per experts, 97% of the life of an underground tank is determined by the tank's coating and the rest by cathodic protection. Regardless of ownership, out of sight should never be out of mind.

Once the underground installation is completed, it must be monitored. National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 58 requires that all underground

ASME tanks meet installation and cathodic protection codes and standards. Periodic pipe-to-soil tests must be conducted and documented. All parties should be made aware of the findings of the tests and appropriate actions implemented if necessary.

Maintaining the area under the tanks' dome is of primary importance. Are all valves accessible? Does the relief valve have a protective cap in place? Are regulators protected from water submersion? Is there visible atmospheric corrosion that may indicate there could be serious galvanic corrosion? Are data plates intact and legible? Installers and drivers should do their best to keep dirt and debris out of the dome area. Sloping the tank for runoff can be greatly beneficial.

EMPLOYEE TRAINING PREVENTS UNDERGROUND TANK ACCIDENTS

As is typical with most accidents, multiple factors often contribute to the occurrence of an incident. Employee training is the primary prevention



method. Propane company owners, technicians, contractors and delivery drivers all need to understand how to assess whether an underground tank may be compromised and pose a safety hazard.

Bulk delivery drivers play a critical role in monitoring both above- and below-ground containers, regardless of brand name or ownership. Are they trained to identify code violations? Are they familiar with out-of-gas or interruption-of-service pressure testing requirements?

RESPONDING TO UNDERGROUND TANK LEAKS

After years of training first responders in Florida and beyond, the No. 1 complaint I hear from responders is that they often cannot identify the owner or fuel provider when responding to an underground tank leak. Metallic or plastic tags reflecting the provider's name and contact number must be affixed to the tank valve or riser and are commonly available. Unfortunately, in my own experience, I have found this complaint to be true and valid. Decals are a poor identification substitute for underground tanks. If you are the current propane supplier, affix your ID tag nearest to the service valve. If you are no longer the fuel provider, remove it and advise the customer you have done so.

First responders and all parties must understand that propane has no shelf life. It is flammable regardless of age and will always present a hazard. Companies should frequently generate tank throughput reports and pay special attention to zero usage accounts of all types.

READING UNDERGROUND TANK LEVELS

An ASME tank's fuel gauge (dial) should never be relied on or taken as an indication that the tank is completely empty. Is it possible that an inactive tank is reading the water level in the container? If a technician or driver can fully depress the liquid filler valve and the gauge is reading anything but zero, the gauge may be reading a water level.

If the tank is determined to be completely empty, gas should never be introduced until a pressure test of the tank is conducted. This pressure test will determine the integrity of the tank welds, seams, threads, openings and the entire containers' surface. Refer to your company policy.

To perform the test, shut the tank service valve off to the structure. Install a 0- to 120-pound pressure block gauge and use a small cylinder and flexible hose to drift fill a small quantity of propane (vapor only) into the tank. Pressure should be, at minimum, 50 pounds or higher. Thoroughly soap check all tank valves, regulators and fittings. Conduct the pressure test over a period of 24 hours or per your company's policy.

Record and document the test's start and end time and the beginning and ending pressure. If you determine the tank is suitable for continued service, perform a cathodic protection pipe-to-soil test. This will ensure that the anode(s) are still functioning and providing sufficient corrosion protection. Replace the anode(s) if readings are low. Purge any air or nitrogen (if used) before filling.

Fill valve and service valve lockouts help prevent accidents like the Sterling, Virginia, case.



WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF A TANK LEAK

Should the gauge lose pressure, you can then assume the tank has been compromised and should be scheduled for removal. NFPA 58 provides steps in properly abandoning underground tanks on-site; however, I would check with your state or local authority having jurisdiction requirements.

For whatever purpose, if there is a delay in evacuating the tank, mechanical fill and service valve locks must be installed. Most use an easily available, inexpensive, "clamshell"-type locking mechanism or another type of fill valve restriction lock. Red tag the tank and update your database and delivery communications method accordingly.



First responders put out an ignited propane tank.



First responders train on flaring a propane tank to reduce internal pressure in the event of a leak or accident.

Underground propane leaks, regardless of the source, always follow the path of least resistance and are not easily detectable. Soil and sand will scrub the odorant from the gas.

Where a concentration of gas is suspected or apparent (frost, dead vegetation, coal-black earth or insects),

evacuate the structure immediately, removing people upwind and uphill. Extinguish all sources of ignition and do not operate any doorbells, light switches or garage door openers. Let the building air out naturally. Call 911. Consider notifying your utility to bring down the power to the structure. Protect lives, play defense.

A bar-prove leak survey on any underground tank or piping system must be performed with a combustible gas indicator. Test around the circumference of the tank, underground piping and near the foundation of the residence or building. Record any percentage of gas detected and actions taken to mitigate the leak.

Underground bulk tanks offer an element of safety, aesthetic benefits and many years of service. The ground temperature keeps the tank's vapor pressure well below the relief valve setting, and in

the event of a fire, in most cases, the fire travels over the dome with no consequences.

Regardless of ownership, an underground propane tank is a highly valuable energy storage asset and a long-term investment — and must be treated like one. ▀

Carl Weeks is the owner of Propane Training Services, which he founded in Florida in 2009. Weeks brings more than 46 years of management experience to the propane industry. From 1979 to 2008, he held positions at Petrolane Gas Service, Superior/Skelgas and Heritage Propane, developing expertise and leadership in the field. Propane Training Services provides propane emergency response and safety training. Through Weeks' leadership, the company has trained more than 18,000 first responders and more than 3,000 propane employees in handling and mitigating propane-related incidents. Contact Weeks at 941-915-0721 or at crweeks@verizon.net. Visit propanetrainingservices.com.



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COATINGS UNLOCK PERFORMANCE & COMPLIANCE FOR PROPANE TANKS

Advanced coatings help propane tanks meet safety & regulatory requirements while improving durability & sustainability

BY THOMAS BITHELL



ENHANCING PERFORMANCE OF PROPANE TANKS

Propane tanks encounter a variety of harsh conditions: UV exposure, moisture, soil chemistry, temperature cycling and mechanical impacts during transport or servicing. Corrosion under insulation can also be a problem. These stresses make coatings essential for both aboveground and underground propane tanks.

Aboveground tanks benefit from a combination of coatings to maintain integrity and appearance over time. A zinc-rich primer coating is often used for sacrificial protection from corrosion, followed by an epoxy barrier layer, with a polyurethane topcoat providing UV protection and scratch resistance. Overall, coatings systems are designed to offer strong adhesion and protection against weather, abrasion and chemical exposure. Beyond protection performance, coating properties such as fast-curing or requiring minimal surface preparation can significantly reduce downtime where repainting or repair is required.

Portable cylinders have their own performance demands. They are frequently handled, transported and therefore more subject to abrasion. Coatings that resist chipping and impact damage can extend service lives and reduce the frequency of failures. In all cases, selecting coatings engineered for the tank's specific environment helps ensure consistent performance and reliable service.

MEETING U.S. COMPLIANCE & SAFETY STANDARDS

The U.S. propane industry operates under a well-defined set of codes and regulations that directly influence coating requirements.

For stationary tanks, the core reference is the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 58 Liquefied Petroleum Gas Code. Its requirements cover corrosion protection for underground tanks to the conditions under which a container may be filled. Proper coating application is integral to compliance, particularly in preventing or mitigating corrosion that could compromise tank integrity. For underground

Paints and coatings are fundamental to safety, long-term durability and regulatory compliance to industries worldwide. Beyond acting as a protective layer, coatings increasingly serve as functional enablers that improve manufacturability, enhance energy efficiency and support evolving environmental goals.

As United States regulations evolve and the propane industry continues to balance efficiency, safety and environmental responsibility, coating technologies are important tools at the industry's disposal. The right coating system can extend tank life, reduce maintenance costs, improve corrosion resistance and ensure adherence to regulatory standards. This article explores how coatings support performance, compliance and sustainability across both stationary tanks and portable cylinders.

installations, NFPA 58 mandates corrosion protection systems and requires periodic testing and documentation of cathodic protection performance. Tanks that do not meet corrosion protection standards may not be filled until the issue is resolved.

Transport cylinders fall under U.S. Department of Transportation regulations, which require cylinders to meet specific material, construction and maintenance standards. Cylinders must be visually inspected before filling and any evidence of corrosion, pitting or physical damage can disqualify them from service. High-quality coatings play a preventive role by minimizing corrosion and helping cylinders pass these visual inspections consistently.

Environmental regulations also influence coating choices. The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) rules for architectural and industrial maintenance coatings include nationwide limits on volatile organic compound (VOC) emissions.

These rules have driven the widespread adoption of lower VOC, waterborne, powder and high solids coating systems. In addition, some U.S. states, such as California, impose stricter VOC limits that manufacturers and applicators must consider when selecting products.

The regulatory climate around PFAS-containing chemicals is also tightening. PFAS are long-lasting chemicals — sometimes called “forever chemicals” — with components that break down very slowly over time. As federal agencies expand reporting, designation and cleanup requirements for certain PFAS, many coating manufacturers are reformulating products to eliminate these substances. PFAS-free coatings are a lower-risk, future-proof option.

SUPPORTING LONG-TERM ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS

Sustainability in propane tank coatings manifests in several areas: emissions reduction, resource efficiency, recyclability and regulatory adaptability.

What is an Advanced Coating?

- IDTechEx definition: Emerging material/technology or an emerging application of an existing technology.
- Offer several advantageous properties: **Anti-corrosion, dielectric insulation, EMI shielding, fire protection, thermally conductive, self-healing...**

Coatings are everywhere...



Lower-VOC and low-hazard formulations reduce emissions during application and improve air quality, making them preferable for both environmental and worker safety reasons. They can also reduce ventilation requirements. This increases the desirability of waterborne and high solids powder coatings.

Durability is another sustainability dimension. Extending the lifespan of tanks and cylinders through better corrosion resistance reduces the frequency of repainting, blasting and transport, thereby lowering operational emissions and waste.

A coating system that extends the service life of a tank surface not only lowers life-cycle cost but also materially reduces environmental impact. Furthermore, coatings that do not inhibit the reusability and recyclability of propane tanks at end of life are also strongly desirable.

Finally, choosing coating technologies designed to comply with current and expected future regulations helps avoid costly reformulations or operational changes down the line. As PFAS-related rules evolve and as more regions adopt stricter VOC limits, the industry is recognizing the value of selecting coatings that are both high performing and regulatory resilient in the long term.

LOOKING AHEAD

As performance expectations grow and regulatory pressures tighten, coatings will remain central to effective propane tank management. From extending tank life to supporting environmental goals, advanced coating systems offer real advantages for propane marketers, equipment suppliers and service providers.

The industry is well positioned to benefit from next-generation coating materials that deliver durability, compliance and sustainability — ensuring tanks remain safe, efficient and reliable across their full life cycle. ▀

Thomas Bithell is a technology analyst at IDTechEx, currently focusing on sustainability and advanced materials. Before joining IDTechEx in 2024, Bithell graduated from the University of Oxford with a Master of Chemistry and has taught chemistry at King's College School Wimbledon. He is based in London, England. With IDTechEx, Bithell's research has focused on sustainable technologies and advanced materials. Bithell has completed reports on “Sustainable Semiconductor and Electronics Manufacturing” and “Next-Generation Feedstocks for Sustainable Chemicals,” while also being responsible for research into advanced coating technologies. Visit [idtechex.com](https://www.idtechex.com).



PROPANE WITHOUT BORDERS: NAVIGATING TOUGH TERRAINS TO DELIVER ESSENTIAL ENERGY

Careful communication with customers & safety precautions lead to successful propane delivery — even in perilous conditions

BY GRACE HUTSON

IMAGES COURTESY OF VALLEY ENERGY



Reliable energy is a lifeline, especially for those who choose the peace and solitude of remote living. However, for propane retailers, the phrase “delivery as usual” often stops where the pavement ends.

Delivering fuel to a mountain cabin or a rural estate involves far more than simply driving from point A to point B; it requires a specialized blend of smart technology and proactive customer education. By integrating technology with clear communication, providers can ensure that even the most secluded homes remain warm and powered, regardless of the terrain.

NAVIGATING CHALLENGING TERRAINS

Accessing remote properties often presents significant logistical hurdles for standard delivery vehicles. Geographical constraints, such as steep driveways and restricted-width roads, require more than routine service. It is important that

delivery protocols prioritize safety and precision, ensuring that even the most difficult-to-reach properties receive consistent, uninterrupted energy service.

To address these challenges, it's important to maintain a reliable fleet engineered specifically to navigate the rugged terrain common in rural regions. By integrating advanced vehicle technology with rigorous safety protocols, companies can ensure precision delivery even under the most demanding conditions.

A commitment to specialized logistics allows companies to provide consistent, uninterrupted propane service to properties that others may find inaccessible.

WINTER READINESS FOR SUCCESSFUL DELIVERIES

Prior to the first snowfall of the season, it is important to encourage customers to begin their winter property preparations. For those in remote locations or with challenging

terrain, winter weather presents unique logistical hurdles. Ensuring that delivery routes are clear and accessible is vital; if a site is deemed inaccessible due to snow or ice, deliveries may unfortunately be delayed or rescheduled to ensure the safety of drivers and equipment. Taking proactive steps now helps to maintain a reliable schedule and ensures your home remains heated throughout the season.

By reminding customers of the following three things, you can help ensure a successful winter delivery in locations that may be more difficult to reach:

1. Keep It Clear — Ensure Access for Delivery Drivers:

Clear pathways are nonnegotiable for safe and efficient fuel delivery. Shovel or clear a path to your fill location. This allows the driver to safely connect the hose. If snowfall is expected, make sure your driveway is plowed or cleared wide enough to provide a



minimum of 9 feet of clearance for the delivery truck to enter and maneuver safely.

2. Mark the Spot — Make Your Location Visible:

Inclement weather can drastically reduce visibility, making it difficult for drivers to locate your property and your specific tank. Ensure your house number is clearly visible

from the road. Mark propane tanks and dome lids before bad weather arrives using a driveway marker or flag that stands above the potential snow level.

3. Be Prepared — Monitor Levels & Emergency Contacts:

Preparation includes being proactive about your fuel supply and having the necessary contact information readily available.



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TANK MONITORS FOR TRACKING USAGE

Eliminate the winter delivery stress for the moments of increased usage. During peak winter months, propane consumption doesn't just increase; it fluctuates wildly based on cold snaps and wind chill. For remote customers, the fear of a "run-out" is a constant source of stress.

Tank monitors allow propane providers and the customer to track their usage. These are especially useful for customers with propane-powered generators in remote locations, given their unpredictable usage and higher Btu load demand. Providing service to remote locations is a logistical challenge. Tank monitors allow for optimized routing, which is better for both the customer and the propane company.

CUSTOMER TEXT NOTIFICATIONS

During peak "heating season," life gets

busy. Automated reminders act as a safety net for those who prefer to manage their own ordering. For a customer at the end of a long, private road, a delivery truck isn't just a vehicle; it's a vital resource. Text notifications provide a transparent window into provider operations:

Low-Level Alerts: By syncing the customer's tank monitor with a company messaging system, an automated text is triggered the moment the tank hits a specific threshold (e.g., 30%). This removes the "out of sight, out of mind" risk common with remote properties.

Confirmation of Service: A "Delivery Complete" text offers immediate peace of mind. For seasonal residents or those away from home, knowing their fuel has been replenished provides the confidence that their property is protected against freezing temperatures.

Reliability is the foundation of remote service. Regular, automated updates

prove to the customer that we are watching their back, even when they aren't looking at their tank.

Ultimately, bridging the gap between the terminal and a remote mountain home is a shared responsibility. By combining a specialized fleet and real-time monitoring technology with a customer base that prioritizes site accessibility, retailers can transform "difficult" deliveries into routine successes.

Investing in these preparations ensures that no matter how far off the beaten path a property may be, it remains a safe, warm and reliable sanctuary throughout the harshest months of the year. ▀

Grace Hutson is the marketing manager for Valley Energy. To learn more, visit valleyenergy.org. Hutson can be contacted at grace@valleyenergy.org.



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LOCAL ROOTS, LASTING GROWTH: HOW REGIONAL PROPANE COMPANIES MAINTAIN COMMUNITY CONNECTION THROUGH EXPANSION

Strategies propane marketers can use to honor sellers, support employees
& retain customers through successful acquisitions

BY TRENT HAMPTON



PSYCHOSHADOW/IMAGEBROKER - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Every year, dozens of independent propane companies are acquired by larger companies. These deals can be good for our industry — consolidation makes the acquiring company more efficient and profitable by providing economies of scale.

More importantly, a seller can convert his or her life's work — and in many cases generations of a family's hard work — into funding for a well-earned retirement

and/or generational wealth transfer. But what about the customers and the communities these companies serve? This is one of the biggest challenges an acquiring company faces: How can we ensure that local relationships and service values continue after we buy a smaller independent?

These are important questions for several reasons. First, the buyer often values a business based on the income

stream it produces and may lose some of that income if customers feel less valued by a larger company. And sellers usually prefer to sell to companies that will treat their customers, employees and communities well.

The propane industry's history of local and personal service is one of our great strengths. After all, how many of us feel any loyalty to our cable company or internet service provider? Generally,

Your new employees may have a better understanding of your new market area & customer base than you do, especially if you did not have existing operations in that town. Listen to them & make sure they feel empowered to help you retain & grow the business. Employees value even modest incentives that encourage them to drive customer retention & growth.

we don't, because we have no personal relationship with anyone at those companies who can help us solve our problems.

They have outsourced us to chatbots and distant call centers; why would we feel any loyalty to them if another provider or alternative solution is available to us?

On the other hand, propane customers have the choice that cable and internet customers do not. If the personal, local experience is important to them, there are usually propane companies that maintain a local presence in their area. Our company receives reviews weekly that mention our customer service reps, service techs or drivers by name. That doesn't happen much in industries where companies commoditize their customers.

How can we strive for a "win-win-win," where the customers receive the level of service they want (and possibly some extra features with an acquiring company), sellers are assured their long-time customers and community are treated well, and the buyer receives the benefit of the business it valued based on the income stream?

BE FAIR TO THE SELLERS

The sellers, if treated well, will be your best ambassadors to the community and your new customers. Even though every sale is a negotiation, do not use your economic advantage or transactional experience to their disadvantage. This may be one of a series of transactions for you; for them, it is a once-in-a-lifetime

event and may be the culmination of several generations of lives' work. Make sure they get a fair deal and have a positive experience.

I have seen disputes over a handful of tanks leave a sour taste on an otherwise successful transaction. Those kinds of disagreements can result in damage to the reputation of a business far outweighing the value of a few 500-gallon tanks. Rest assured, if the community feels like one of its own has been mistreated, they will take it out on your business.

TREAT EMPLOYEES WELL

Your new employees are your next-best ambassadors to the community. Have a clear plan to communicate with them at the earliest possible opportunity.

Make sure they know as much as possible about what their future looks like and their role with the new company. Point out any tangible or intangible benefits they may receive, like better employee benefits, more career opportunities, better equipment, etc.

New employees are bound to have questions after the shock of an announced acquisition wears off. Anticipate questions about employee benefits, approval processes and reporting relationships, which frequently come up. Provide them with a list of contacts who can help with the questions they may have.

That said, don't overwhelm them with too much information or paperwork too soon; if they are emotionally invested

in their job, this is nearly as stressful for them as it is for the sellers.

COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS

Be ready to communicate quickly and effectively with your new customers. Some acquisitions can be completed without any visibility to the customer, and communication may not be warranted.

We have a lot of residential business in small communities in the Midwest, and as a native of a small town myself, I know that "news" travels fast. I prefer to communicate as quickly as possible with our new customers. They have been loyal to our sellers for a reason, and I want to assure them that will continue to the same level of service the seller provided — perhaps with a few enhancements or new programs they can (but don't have to) use.

When you promise to maintain quality service, mean it and live it.

BE THOUGHTFUL ON BRANDING

Propane companies have varying philosophies on whether to keep the brand name of an acquired business. Some buyers rebrand acquisitions, others retain the existing local brands.

There are positives and negatives for each approach, and there is no easy answer. Online platforms, back-office systems, vehicle signage and blended operations are all factors to be considered, as is the reputational value of both the buyer's and seller's brands in the community. Communication is the

key, both with your customers and your internal teams.

ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Propane owners tend to be pillars in their community, involved in or supporting a variety of activities. Look for opportunities to continue or start new sponsorships and encourage your employees to remain active in civic functions. It never hurts to reach out to local leaders, bankers and others who are influential in the community. You will often receive information that will help you grow — not just retain — the business you purchased.

EMPOWER EMPLOYEES

Your new employees may have a better understanding of your new market area and customer base than you do, especially if you did not have existing operations in that town. Listen to them

and make sure they feel empowered to help you retain and grow the business. Employees value even modest incentives that encourage them to drive customer retention and growth. Again, these incentive programs are a win-win-win, as customers benefit when your new employees help you provide better, local service.

ANTICIPATE CHANGE TOGETHER

At the outset, a buyer may reassure sellers, customers and employees that not much will change. And the seller and employees may reassure the buyer that they can accept a little change.

Despite these good intentions, at least a few changes are inevitable, and sellers and employees may balk at some of them. Gradually prepare sellers and employees from the outset with the changes you can anticipate and encourage them to provide advice and participate in advance.

STRENGTHENING TRUST ACROSS THE TRANSITION

By following some of this advice, buyers can make the transition of a business much smoother and more profitable. It will be that “win-win-win” — where sellers, buyers and customers alike see the benefit of a transaction.

I have framed this as sound business strategy, which I believe it to be. But it is not just about business. Valuing relationships with sellers, employees, customers and communities is not only good business, but also good corporate citizenship — and it's the right thing to do. ■

Trent Hampton is the CEO of Lakes Gas and a 25-year veteran of the propane industry. He is the current vice chair of the National Propane Gas Association and served as a Propane Education & Research Council councilor for two years. Visit lakesgas.com.



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serving the North Georgia region and a recent expansion into North Carolina, Folger Gas LLC has made a name for itself with a reputation for family values and community engagement among its customer base. Company leadership and staff believe in doing things right the first time and putting customer needs first. This means delivering on promises and keeping homes and businesses running safely and efficiently. In this first edition of BPN's new Marketer Spotlight, **Pete Folger**, managing member for Folger Gas, shares about the company's history, values and enduring legacy.



Folger Gas employees with 10-plus years of service in the company gather for a group photo.

Can you tell us about Folger Gas LLC's company history?

Folger Gas LLC is a third-generation business. Phil and Doris Folger started Folger Gas in Dahlonega, Georgia, in 1971. They sold their location in 1998 and have retired. The Blue Ridge, Georgia, location opened in 1990. Kim and I left the United States Marines after 10 years and moved to Blue Ridge; we began working at Folger Gas in 1996 and are still actively managing the business.

We purchased Triple L gas company in Jefferson, Georgia, in 2010. We opened a new start-up in Hiawassee, Georgia, in 2022 and our son Greg is the manager there. We just opened another branch in Murphy, North Carolina, in November 2025.

What is your service area, and what types of customers do you serve?

We cover northeast Georgia, western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee. We also cover an approximate 50-mile radius around Jefferson, Georgia. We serve commercial and agricultural accounts. We opened our first school bus refueling station, but our largest segment is our residential customers.

How would you describe your company's mission and values, and how do you put those into practice with your customers?

Our mission and values are to focus on leased, residential, multi-appliance



Employees enjoy conversation at an event at Folger Gas' Hiawassee, Georgia, location.

customers and give them the best service available. We have continued to add servicemen and vehicles to offer quick, reliable, full-service options to our customers. We have continued to add delivery drivers to ensure reliable, worry-free deliveries even in trying times.

What about your business and its offerings helps you stand out as a marketer in your region?

The quick, reliable, full-service offerings of our service teams and quick, reliable gas deliveries. We offer a wide array of

appliances, fully pipe in new homes and additional burner tips, and do this in a timely manner. We also pride ourselves on not having run-outs on the delivery side of the business. We also have a friendly staff that answers the phone in our locations to service the customer.

Can you tell us a story about a specific customer need and how your team worked to meet that need?

A few years ago, when most all parts were very difficult to obtain, we built and rented storage units. We bought a years' worth of our normal parts and appliances. We bought tanks a year in advance and put trucks on order for two years out. This allowed us to continue to serve our customers when some of our competitors didn't have the resources to do the same.

Can you tell us a story that demonstrates how

AS A SMALL BUSINESS OWNER ... PERSONNEL IS MY NO. 1 CONCERN. WITH GREAT, WELL-TRAINED PEOPLE, WE CAN OVERCOME A LOT OF OBSTACLES."

an employee (or multiple employees) embodies your company values?

Our employees really embrace the 'get the job completely done prior to going home each day.' As everyone knows, sometimes things don't go as planned. Our employees really work as a team to get all service jobs or deliveries completed before going home every day. This sounds easy, but is not. They all know if a customer is expecting service on a guaranteed day, they are inconvenienced or worse if they do not receive it.

What industry trends have impacted Folger Gas LLC the most in recent years?

We have tried to stay up on technology. We have implemented tank monitors, in-vehicle cameras and tablets in the delivery trucks, as well as the service trucks. We feel we can give the customer more professional service in a more timely manner. The second industry trend is that while some competitors are closing down offices and reducing staff, we are adding offices and increasing staff to better serve our customers. Word of mouth is working, and we are gaining business at the fastest pace in our company's history.

Is there anything your team is concerned about/keeping an eye on in the industry?

There are many things to worry about as a small business owner in the propane business. Personnel is my No. 1 concern. With great, well-trained people, we can overcome a lot of obstacles. We also worry about the electrification movement, but I feel propane is uniquely positioned to win this battle. 🏆

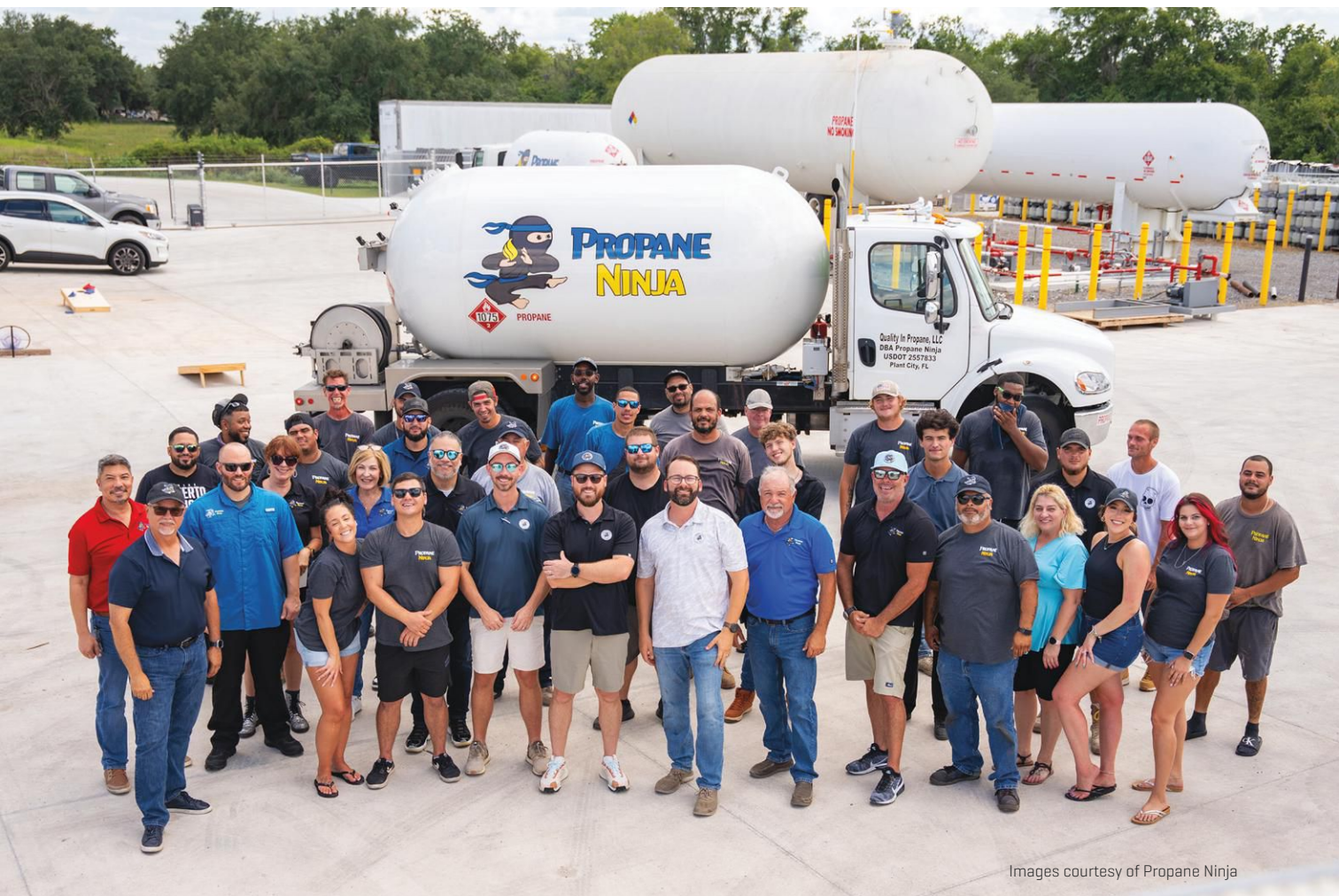


Left to right: Doris Folger, Greg Folger, Pete Folger and Kim Folger

STARTING FROM SCRATCH: 3 LESSONS FROM A DECADE OF ORGANIC GROWTH

Key takeaways & challenges behind building a fast-growing, sustainable propane business

BY PETER SAMUELSON



Images courtesy of Propane Ninja

To survive, the propane industry must grow. Our customers deserve strong, independent companies that can successfully take on their business without failing them. Sustained aggressive growth is possible. As the cofounder of Propane Ninja, I have learned firsthand how to achieve growth and navigate the challenges that come with it.

When my business partner, Mike Dodd, and I started our propane company in 2013 with no more than a pickup truck

and \$5,000 in cash, we had no idea the growth journey we were about to embark upon. As industry outsiders, we had to learn how to operate in our industry from scratch. That meant learning hard lessons but also allowed for an out-of-the-box approach to building a propane business.

I believe there are three key lessons we learned and three key challenges we have had to overcome that will help any company achieve rapid, sustainable growth.

3 LESSONS FOR SUSTAINABLE COMPANY GROWTH

The following takeaways from our experiences growing a propane business can provide a framework for intentionally building your company's processes and internal philosophies.

Lesson 1: Sales-Focused

In our very early years, we never had the infrastructure, employees or assets our competition had. Instead, we had a simple philosophy that drove us forward. We knew if we went out and made sales, the revenue would support our operational needs.

In those early years, if we were not physically delivering tanks, we would be spending the entire day knocking on doors and selling our propane tank delivery service. Those early repeat customers were the foundation of a recurring revenue stream we could build upon year after year.

Too many companies focus on their current operational constraints and only take whatever business happens to come through the door. To have truly sustained growth beyond your competition, you need to invest in your sales team and make new business development a major segment and focus of your company.

Lesson 2: Intentional Growth

While being sales-focused is essential, it does require discipline. Sustainable growth does not happen by accident. To grow successfully and consistently requires proactive planning of exactly how much you want to grow your business. I recommend looking at the total market share of your service area and recognizing a realistic amount of that market that could be yours.

Then, I recommend looking at your different divisions and deciding which sectors best fit your business (return on investment, operational efficiency and customer stickiness should all be deciding factors).

Next, calculate how much growth you could afford based off either your appetite for debt or current free cash flow

Stagnant companies are often run by owners ... who have convinced themselves they have nothing left to learn, while growing companies have leaders who thrive in the discomfort of new demands.

you can put toward new assets. Once you have calculated your growth goal, work backward on how many additional customers you will need to sign up on a weekly basis and ensure you hire the right number of salespeople that can consistently bring in this business.

One of the most common issues I see among smaller, family-owned propane companies is neglecting to invest in actually building a sales team that can consistently bring in new customers. Without intentional investment in sales capacity, growth remains unpredictable and heavily dependent on market conditions, rather than strategy.

Lesson 3: Continuous Learning

Because we started out with no industry knowledge, we had to rapidly learn and

soak up as much information as we could on how a successful propane company operates.

Thankfully, we had incredible mentors along the way, including Gardner and Billy, the owners of Countryside Propane. Besides learning from them directly, Gardner also took us as guests to our first National Propane Gas Association Southeastern & International Propane Expo, where we learned more about how companies of all sizes across the country were operating.

We also began to get involved with our local state association, where we learned more about our local challenges and opportunities.

Third, we always kept our eyes and ears open to other industries and attended conferences, trade shows and trainings



to learn what best-in-class companies were doing. Through our growth, we have maintained this involvement in both our industry and learning from others.

If a propane company does not get involved in either the state or local level, I can say they are missing out on opportunities that could benefit their growth.

3 CHALLENGES FROM GROWTH

Aggressive growth can be a boon, but it is not without its challenges. The following three challenges demonstrate pitfalls to avoid on your way to sustainable growth.

Challenge 1: Outpacing Your Resources

Avoid outpacing your resources too far. Unmanaged growth can surpass your equipment capacity, labor capacity and, most importantly, your cash flow.

This is where the intention in lesson two of planning your growth must

include estimates of the equipment needs, operational requirements and debt service or cash requirements, along with projected revenues.

Thankfully, the average propane customer will be with you for many years, and if you can accurately estimate their demand using historical data, then you should have no problem creating a pricing model that accounts for both the increased revenues and increased costs. Ensure your sales team operates within the parameters of the pricing model and you will be able to steer clear of major danger.

Challenge 2: Maintaining Connection

In our early years, we knew each and every one of our customers. We also had strong relationships with each person on our small team. However, as you continue to grow and delegate tasks, there will inevitably be a challenge in keeping

that connection with your customers, as well as with your employees. No longer can you be involved in all areas of the business at once, and you must create systems and processes of communication both internally and externally.

We implemented a system called the Entrepreneurs Operating System six years into our business, and the best practices and guidance were pivotal in creating internal sustainability in facing the challenges from constant growth and the changes it brings.

At one point, the volume of calls we received on a daily basis grew so substantially that we implemented a third-party answering service. After about a year of this, we learned it was negatively impacting our customers' experience. We quickly pivoted to hiring additional support staff and having our team members answer the phone calls in our office.



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The lesson we learned was that maintaining a human connection with your customers is key. As you grow, that will set you apart from the larger competitors.

Challenge 3: Outgrowing Your Abilities

The largest challenge I have faced with rapid growth has been the constant shifting of what the business demands from me as a leader. In the early years, I was actually doing the sales, delivering the product, billing the customer and more, myself.

As the company grew, I had to take on new roles and learn new skills to be able to continue meeting the needs of the business.

This is where lesson three of continuous learning is so fundamental. You will not be able to grow your business successfully without upgrading your own skill set of both technical and leadership

abilities. Stagnant companies are often run by owners or managers who have convinced themselves they have nothing left to learn, while growing companies have leaders who thrive in the discomfort of new demands.

As owners and managers, we must be sure to take time to work *on* the business and not just *in* the business. This challenge also applies to staff in all positions. There may be some team members who were suited for a role at one size but not when the company is three or four times larger. Constant reevaluation of your team to ensure the right people are in the right seats is essential. Often, moving someone from a role that has outgrown them means setting them and your company up for success.

In closing, I would challenge all those leaders in our industry to take ownership

of the growth of your business and accept that a higher level of growth is possible. There will be challenges with higher growth, but with the right resources, mindset and people, you can experience far greater growth and success. ■

Peter Samuelson, who cofounded Propane Ninja in 2013, is the chief operating officer of the Florida-based propane company serving thousands of residential and commercial customers across the state. He oversees operations, finance and strategic growth across multiple divisions, with a focus on scalable systems, safety and disciplined execution. Samuelson is actively involved in industry leadership through the national and state propane gas associations and regularly contributes perspectives on operational excellence and growth in the propane sector. Visit propaneninja.com.



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THE 5 GAPS HINDERING GROWTH FOR YOUR PROPANE COMPANY

How small operational blind spots quietly limit growth & make businesses harder to run

BY BEN GUTKIN

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Most propane businesses do not stall because something breaks outright. More often, the company appears to be working. Calls get answered and trucks go out. Customers complain, but not more than usual. And yet, growth still feels harder than it should.

On paper, the operation looks steady. In reality, margins are thinner than they used to be, retention is uneven and new accounts don't always stick. What's usually happening is not a single failure but a collection of small gaps in how the business runs.

Those gaps don't show up as obvious breakdowns, but as friction — like customer service representatives (CSRs) fielding plenty of calls but not turning enough of them into new customers, a route that should be profitable but never quite is or a marketing effort that

generates interest but few real customers. The office stays busy, but the business never feels like it's moving forward.

Most owners try to fix this by hiring another person or tightening a few policies. Sometimes that helps; more often, it just adds costs on top of problems that were never clearly defined.

The gaps outlined ahead are different. They sit where customer experience and profitability meet. Closing them doesn't require rebuilding the business. Instead, it means making the business you already have work the way it should.

GAP #1: PRICE-FOCUSED CONVERSATIONS THAT IGNORE YOUR COMPANY'S VALUE

Many propane customers begin their search with a simple question: "How much?" How you handle that question

often determines whether your company is seen as a provider or a commodity.

When CSRs respond with price alone, key differentiators never enter the conversation. Reliability, safety standards, delivery performance and responsiveness may all be strong, but they go unspoken. As a result, the customer evaluates your company the same way they evaluate every other option.

This is usually an issue of structure, not performance. Without clear guidance on how to frame value quickly and naturally, your staff defaults to the most direct answer available.

Over time, price-only conversations do more than compress margin. They shape the customer base. Accounts won solely on price tend to be more volatile, more service-intensive and harder to retain,

increasing operational strain and slowing long-term growth.

GAP #2: INCONSISTENT FEE APPLICATION CREATES FRICTION

Delivery fees and service charges protect margin, but inconsistency in how they are applied undermines both customer confidence and internal efficiency.

When policies vary by account or employee, customers begin to question fairness, and staff become uncertain about how strictly those policies should be applied. Each exception may seem minor, but inconsistency steadily erodes margin while increasing call volume, confusion and follow-up work.

This gap is less about being rigid and more about clarity. When you clearly define fee policies, apply them consistently and communicate them confidently, it becomes easier for staff to support these policies and easier for customers to accept them.

When you clearly define fee policies, apply them consistently & communicate them confidently, it becomes easier for staff to support these policies & easier for customers to accept them.

GAP #3: UNDERUSING BUDGET PLANS AS A GROWTH & STABILITY TOOL

Budget plans are common in the propane industry, but their full value is often underutilized. When businesses treat these plans only as a billing option, they tend to offer them inconsistently or only when customers ask. Used properly, budget plans stabilize revenue, reduce seasonal stress for customers and improve retention across heating seasons.

They also create predictability for the business. As companies grow, that predictability becomes increasingly valuable. The strongest operators treat budget plans as part of the customer experience, not an afterthought.

GAP #4: LEAD ATTRIBUTION WITHOUT CLEAR RETURN

Propane companies generate leads through calls, website visits, referrals and local visibility. What is often missing is clarity on which leads actually contribute

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to growth. Without lead attribution, it becomes difficult to know which channels produce qualified prospects, which generate activity without conversions and where money is being spent without meaningful return. When tracking and follow-up are inconsistent, decisions rely on assumptions instead of evidence.

Companies that close this gap know where leads come from, how they are handled, what they cost and whether they turn into profitable, long-term customers. That clarity allows the business to invest with confidence and grow more efficiently.

GAP #5: CUSTOMER FEEDBACK ISN'T USED TO IMPROVE OPERATIONS

Customer feedback comes through calls, reviews, surveys and informal comments. Without a structure for processing this feedback, much of it remains anecdotal.

When feedback is not gathered consistently or reviewed in aggregate, people miss patterns. Service issues persist, and opportunities to improve training and communication go unnoticed.

Used properly, feedback becomes more than a satisfaction metric. It becomes a tool for improving consistency, reducing repeat issues and strengthening customer relationships.

Most propane businesses already have strong foundations: experienced teams, loyal customers and dependable operations. The challenge is not capability but alignment.

When gaps go unaddressed, growth adds complexity without proportional return. When those gaps are closed, operations become more predictable, decisions become clearer and growth becomes easier to manage.

In a business shaped by seasonality and service expectations, that difference is what separates steady operators from companies that scale with confidence. ▀

Ben Gutkin is vice president of marketing services for Warm Thoughts Communications and a former Fortune 100 marketing executive, with more than 25 years of experience helping propane, heating oil, HVAC and energy service companies grow through data-driven marketing and customer insight. He has advised dozens of leading energy marketers and trade associations and led the industry's largest national research studies on propane customer behavior and growth. You can reach Gutkin at bgutkin@warmthoughts.com or 201-330-9276. Visit warmthoughts.com.



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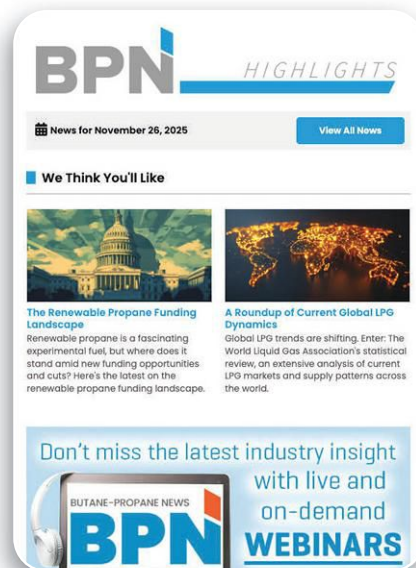
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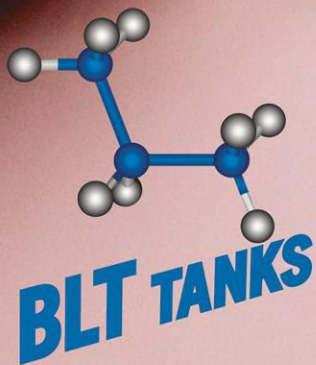
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Jonathan Gilbert

Director of Business Development
Qualpay



Describe your current role at your company. I lead business development for Qualpay in the propane and energy industry. My role is focused on helping marketers reduce processing costs, modernize how they manage payments and improve back-office efficiency through better technology, reporting and best practices.

What would you say is the best lesson you've learned in your career? One of the best lessons I've learned comes from 'The Obstacle Is the Way': the challenge is often the path forward. The moments that feel like setbacks are usually where the most growth and opportunity come from. If you stay focused, adaptable and keep moving, the obstacle often becomes the opportunity.

How do you personally, as well as your company, contribute to a promising future for the propane industry? I'm passionate about helping propane marketers keep more margin by reducing fees and simplifying operations. At Qualpay, we support the industry with a fully integrated payments platform, deep integrations with industry software and ongoing education through association partnerships.

What's the most interesting area of the propane industry right now? The most interesting area right now is modernization, and it is a great opportunity for change across the industry. As card fees rise and customer expectations shift toward digital-first billing, propane marketers are investing in better technology, automation and more actionable payment data. The transition of many family-owned businesses to the next generation is accelerating this shift even further.

What skill do you think everyone in your role or a similar one should learn? In business development, I think the most important skill is learning to stay process-driven. In a relationship industry like this, timing and trust matter, and results don't always come on your schedule. So, show up prepared, stay disciplined, play the long game and don't take things personally.

What do you see as some of your greatest personal accomplishments? A few highlights for me are running a 4:38 mile, competing in the National Championships for ultimate frisbee and summiting Mount Rainier. Most importantly, I'm proud of being present for my family and keeping a healthy work-life balance.

Have you ever felt imposter syndrome? How did/do you overcome it? All the time. I've learned to overcome it by staying prepared, staying curious and remembering that growth comes from leaning into challenges, not avoiding them.

In what ways do you prioritize collaboration and teamwork, and how does this foster innovation and growth? I stay involved by actively participating on committees with state and industry associations like the National Propane Gas Association, Women in Propane, the Pennsylvania Petroleum Association and the Southeast Propane Alliance. I try to treat every relationship as a partnership. The best results happen when marketers, associations and vendors collaborate openly because it drives better solutions and faster innovation. It's also the best way to keep a finger on the pulse of the industry.

If you could only eat one meal for the rest of your life, what would it be? Huevos rancheros. No question.

Which historical figure would you most like to meet? Marcus Aurelius. The great philosopher and Roman emperor.

Do you have any pets? If so, tell us about them! I have a calico cat, Arya.

What are some of your hobbies outside of work? I've been a diehard New England Patriots fan for as long as I can remember, and outside of work I enjoy hiking, trail running, ultimate frisbee, golf, card games and Dungeons & Dragons. 🏠



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