

MARCH 2026

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GaugeLink - Cellular

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Learn more about our latest innovations, including GaugeLink and attend our session— **Cathodic Protection: Ensuring Safety, Compliance, and Efficiency**, on Monday from 10:15 to 11:15 a.m.



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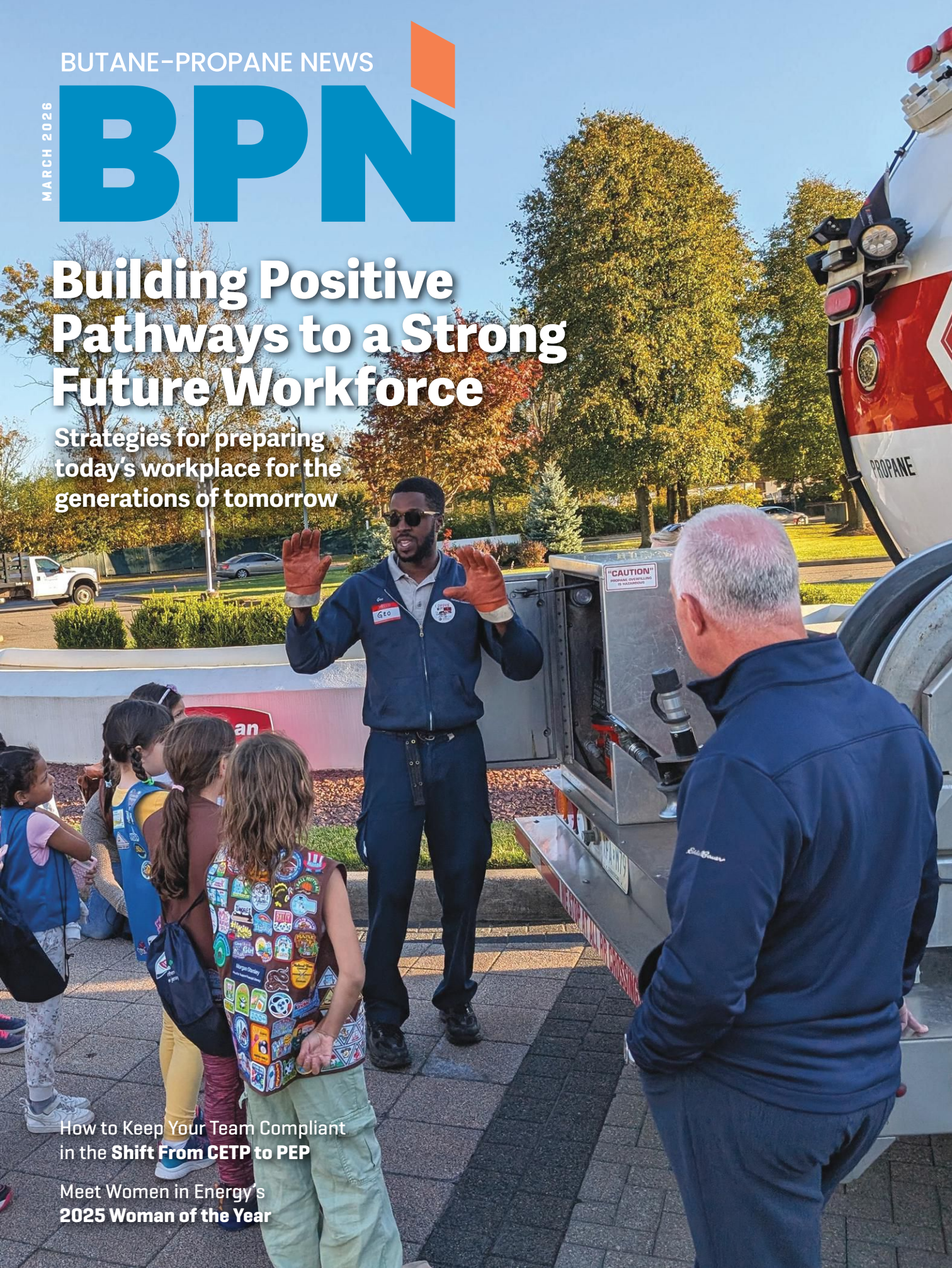
MARCH 2026

BUTANE-PROPANE NEWS

BPN

Building Positive Pathways to a Strong Future Workforce

Strategies for preparing today's workplace for the generations of tomorrow



How to Keep Your Team Compliant in the **Shift From CETP to PEP**

Meet Women in Energy's **2025 Woman of the Year**



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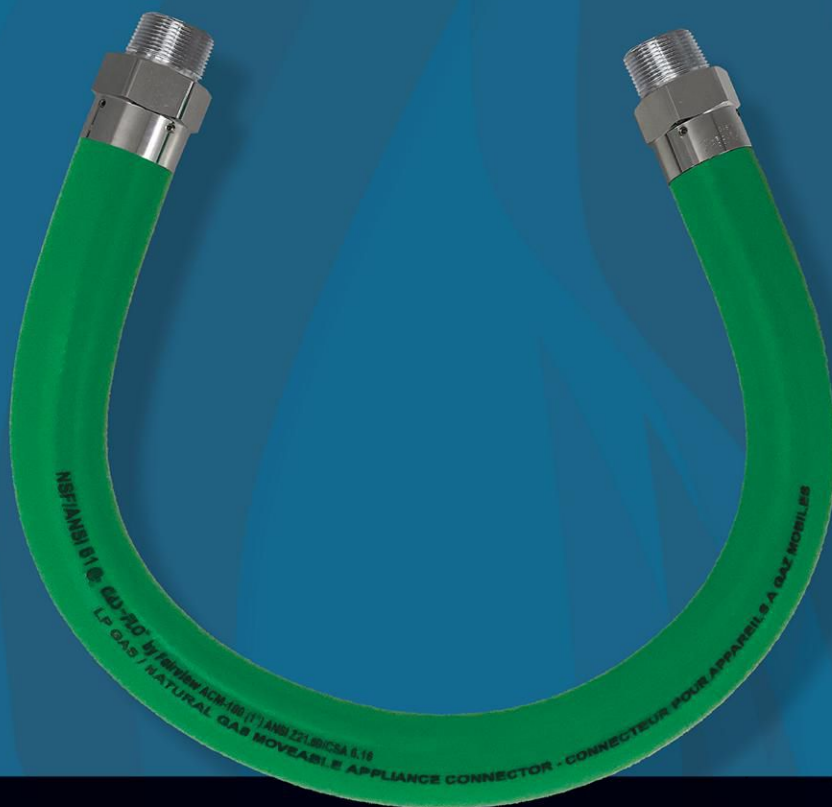
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Dear Readers,
As I write my first letter from the editor, I'm excited to begin by focusing on a theme that sits at the heart of the propane industry: employees.

Trucks, tanks and technology are vital, but it's the employees — from drivers and service technicians to customer service representatives, back-office staff and managers — who power the propane industry every day. Our March issue is dedicated to the people who turn operations into service and keep businesses moving forward.

In recent years, workforce conversations have shifted from long-term planning to immediate action. Labor shortages, an aging workforce and increased competition for skilled talent have pushed propane marketers to take a closer look at how they recruit, retain and support their teams. At the same time, there's been a renewed emphasis on training, safety culture and leadership development — not just as operational necessities, but as meaningful investments in people.

Throughout this issue of BPN, we explore the many ways propane companies are responding to these challenges. From rethinking onboarding and career pathways to strengthening communication and recognizing employee contributions, the stories and insights shared here reflect an industry that understands that its future depends on the strength of its workforce. You'll also see how company culture, mentorship and adaptability continue to play a growing role in keeping employees engaged and motivated.

We're also highlighting efforts that look beyond today's workforce and toward the next generation. This issue includes coverage of Suburban Propane's "Trucks Are for Girls" event, which, in partnership with the Women in Trucking Association, invited a Girl Scout troop to see inside a modern propane operation and explore careers ranging from trucking to leadership. We also recognize Cetane Associates' Pam Giordano, the 2025 Woman of the Year honoree for Women in Energy — a reminder that mentorship, visibility and recognition all play an important role in building a stronger, more inclusive industry.

As always, our goal is to provide practical ideas and thoughtful perspectives you can carry back to your own operation, regardless of size or market. The challenges surrounding workforce development are complex, but they also present an opportunity for the industry to strengthen itself from the inside out.

We hope this issue encourages new conversations, fresh thinking and continued investment in the people who power the propane industry every day. After all, the future of propane is built by the people behind it — and when employees are supported and pathways are made visible, the entire industry moves forward.

Until next time,

Christina Miller

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VOLUME 58 ISSUE 3

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- Tom Sigler
Owner, Eastern Sierra Propane



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March 2026



12



30



24



26

Feature Series: EMPLOYEES

20 The 2026 Guide to Career Pathing

Your 4-step framework for technical & field-based workforces

24 Training the Next Generation: Why HVACR Technical Colleges Must Lead the Shift to Propane-Powered Innovation

Manufacturers like Stone Mountain Technologies are paving the way for cross-industry workforce development

26 Why They Stay: Unlocking Employee Loyalty in Propane Companies

Employee retention in the propane industry depends on building trust, flexibility & meaningful work into the employee experience

Special Section: WOMEN IN PROPANE

30 Trucks Are for Girls: Fueling the Future

Suburban Propane partners with a purpose

36 Introducing Women in Energy's 2025 Woman of the Year

Pam Giordano reflects on the ingredients involved in crafting a successful career in the energy sector



On the Cover

A local Girl Scout troop learns from Suburban Propane about driving bobtails and working at a propane company. [Image courtesy of Suburban Propane.]

6 Marketplace

8 News & Events

12 Verbatim

If you could have one superpower in this life, what would it be & why?

16 Propane & the Law

Odor fade litigation: past, present & future — part 1

18 Resource Center

Navigating the shift from CETP to PEP: How to keep your field team compliant in a changing regulatory landscape

40 Finance

Building a payment processing strategy that works for propane service companies

44 Sustainability

Sustainability in propane operations is built through everyday decisions that improve efficiency, reliability & long-term resilience

46 Workforce Development

Building successful salespeople in the propane industry

50 Marketing

Family-owned values influence customers when it matters most

55 Advertiser Index

56 Industry Insider



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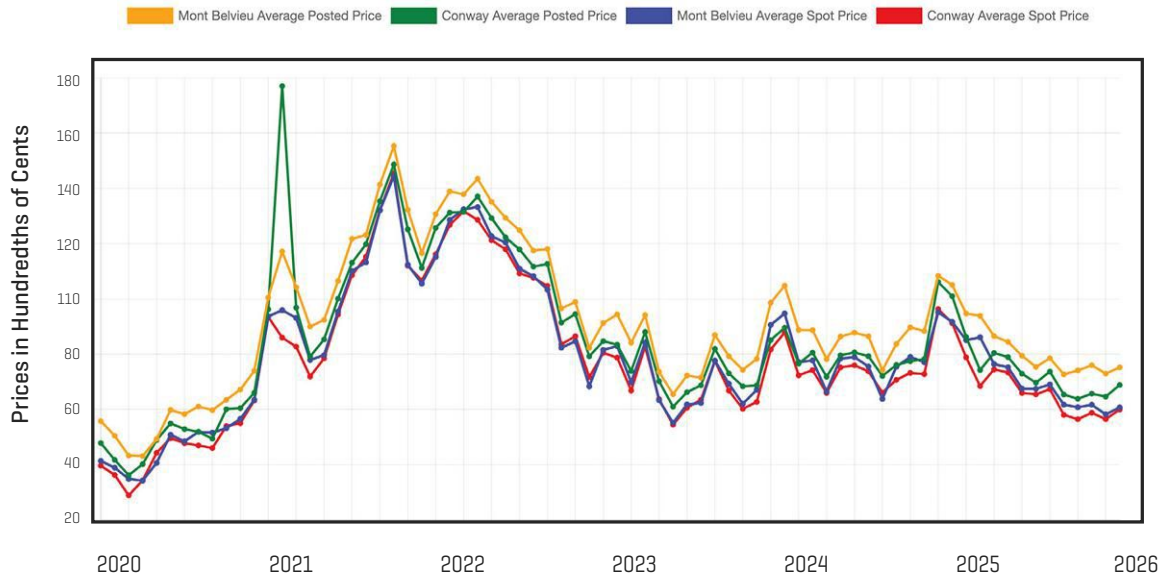


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MONT BELVIEU & CONWAY AVERAGE THURSDAY PROPANE PRICES



at a glance During the latest mid-month period, prices at Mont Belvieu, Texas, increased. The posted prices increased 2.25 cents/gal, from January mid-month to February mid-month, and spot prices increased 2.625 cents. Conway, Kansas, postings increased 4.185 cents/gal and spots increased 3.5 cents over the month.

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

	01/15/26	01/22/26	01/29/26	02/05/26	02/12/26
Mont Belvieu					
posted	73.000	77.250	78.125	77.250	75.250
spot	57.875 – 58.625	65.000 – 66.250	66.000 – 67.000	62.000 – 62.375	60.500 – 61.000
Conway					
posted	64.685	67.870	71.370	70.310	68.870
spot	56.000 – 57.000	59.750 – 62.000	63.250 – 64.000	59.500 – 61.750	59.500 – 60.500

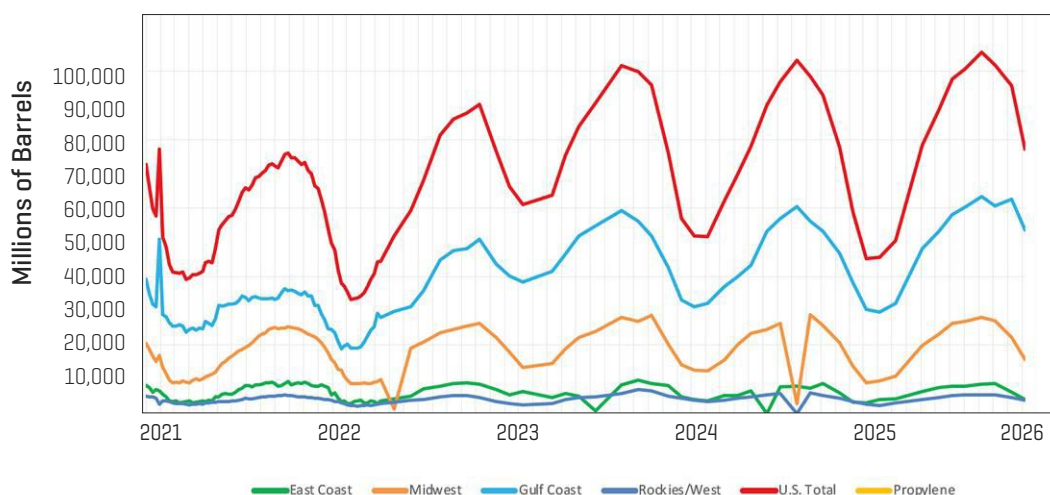
at a glance Canada's primary underground propane inventories decreased by 13.9% in December, according to the Canada Energy Regulator (CER). The total represented a month-to-month decrease of 208.5 Mcm. Compared to a year earlier, stocks were higher, with 75.1 Mcm, or 6.2%, more product on hand. *[Editor's Note: Due to BPN's publishing schedule, January inventory data is the latest available from the CER.]*

CANADIAN INVENTORIES (Thousand Cubic Meters)

	Jan 2026	Dec 2025	Change	Jan 2025
PROPANE				
Propane-East	453.9	540.5	-16%	478.2
Propane-West	839.3	961.2	-12.7%	739.9
Total Propane	1293.2	1501.7	-13.9%	1218.1
BUTANE				
Butane-East	235.2	369.1	-36.3%	347.4
Butane-West	432.9	516.5	-16.2%	302.7
Total Butane	668.1	885.6	-24.6%	650.1

Source: Canada Energy Regulator

U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES



at a glance

United States propane stocks experienced an 18.445 MMbbl decrease from January to February. East Coast stocks decreased 2.228 MMbbl, the Midwest decreased 6.464 MMbbl, the Gulf Coast decreased 9 MMbbl and the Rocky Mountain/West Coast decreased 753,000 bbl. Compared to the same time in February 2025, the February 2026 stocks were 18.411 MMbbl higher.

U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES

Jan. 9 – Feb. 6, 2026, and One Year Ago [Thousand Barrels]

	01/09/26	01/16/26	01/23/26	01/30/26	02/06/26	02/07/25
East Coast	76.328	6.061	5.529	4.907	4.100	3.271
Midwest	22.166	20.937	19.510	17.266	15.702	13.906
Gulf Coast	62.557	62.013	59.633	56.378	53.557	38.108
Rocky Mtn & West Coast	4.663	4.629	4.280	4.165	3.910	3.573
U.S.	95.714	93.640	88.952	82.716	77.269	58.858

U.S. RESIDENTIAL PROPANE PRICES

[Mid-Month, Cents per Gallon]

	Jan 2026	Feb 2026	Feb 2025
East Coast [PADD 1]	341.5	349.8	363.4
Midwest [PADD 2]	208.2	221.3	223.7
Average U.S.	255.7	266.0	274.1

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.

ORAL ARGUMENTS HELD ON NEW YORK GAS BAN CASES

On Jan. 30, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit heard oral arguments for New York gas ban cases. A state-level gas ban was set to go into effect Jan. 1, but on Nov. 12, 2025, gas bans were officially paused by the state, pending the resolution of all legal challenges and appeals. The pause now puts focus on the legal battles taking place in court. Mulhern Gas, along with the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA), the New York State Builders Association and other partners, filed suit in 2025 (*Mulhern v. Rodriguez*), arguing that New York's fossil fuel equipment ban violated the United States Constitution. The U.S. District Court dismissed the case in August without prejudice, allowing plaintiffs to appeal. Ahead of the planned Jan. 1 implementation, the plaintiff group was able to convince the state to pause the ban until litigation had been fully resolved. NPGA President and CEO Steve Kaminski, as well as NPGA Associate General Counsel Kate Gaziano, were in attendance for the oral arguments and helped prep the legal counsel for the case. NPGA and the New York Propane Gas Association are both among the plaintiffs. NPGA shared this statement regarding the case: "The judges stressed a commitment to interpreting the text of the statute and what it meant, with Judge Perez telling Intervenor's counsel that she was not interested in 'policy arguments.' The argument spanned from questions on how to properly test appliances, whether a zero limit on an appliance would be preempted, and to a careful analysis of the text of the statute. The judges also seemed to seriously weigh the Ninth Circuit's decision in *CRA v. Berkeley*, which struck down Berkeley [California]'s gas ban. NPGA will continue to post updates and update membership whenever a decision comes out, which could be a few to several months in the future."

PERC LAUNCHES PROPANE LANDSCAPE DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM

The Propane Education & Research

Council (PERC) launched the Propane Landscape Demonstration Program offering golf course superintendents and landscapers the chance to trial next-generation, propane-powered landscaping equipment. Through the program, participants will receive a propane-powered commercial mower or utility vehicle for a 10-12-day trial period. Participants can use the equipment on their daily routes, gather crew insights and see how it compares to their current gasoline or diesel units. In exchange, participants provide feedback on the equipment's performance. Golf course operators were able to learn more about the program and how propane can support their operations at the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America Conference & Trade Show, which took place Feb. 2-5 in Orlando. To learn more about the Landscape Demonstration Program and to sign up, visit propane.com. Applications will be accepted through December 2026.

LAKES GAS ACQUIRES SUPERIOR GAS SERVICE

Lakes Gas acquired Superior Gas Service in a purchase that reflects Lakes Gas' commitment to local, community-focused propane service while expanding delivery capabilities and convenience for customers throughout the region. The acquisition marks Lakes Gas' 60th staffed location. Founded in 1959, Lakes Gas has long been committed to strengthening access to propane across rural communities throughout the Upper Midwest. As the largest family-owned propane company in the region, Lakes Gas continues to invest in infrastructure, safety advancements and long-term propane supply stability. The acquisition of Superior Gas Service supports these goals by expanding operational capacity, enhancing distribution and reinforcing the company's role in maintaining reliable, locally focused propane solutions. Lakes Gas will continue to emphasize community involvement, local decision-making and the personalized service style that has defined both companies for decades.

AURORA CAPITAL PARTNERS ACQUIRES ANOVA

Aurora Capital Partners acquired Anova, a global provider of solutions serving the industrial gas, propane, fuels, lubricants and chemicals industries. Terms of the transaction were not disclosed. Anova's solutions monitor the location, status and condition of industrial equipment through proprietary hardware, managed connectivity services and a cloud-based software platform. The platform includes modules for forecasting, scheduling, routing, data analytics and business intelligence. The company's technology helps customers manage assets more efficiently, reduce costs and improve equipment reliability. Anova monitors more than 1.8 million assets for more than 2,000 customers in over 80 countries. Baird served as financial adviser to Anova, with Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP acting as legal adviser. Houlihan Lokey served as financial adviser to Aurora Capital Partners, with Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP serving as legal adviser. Golub Capital arranged the debt financing for the transaction.

PPATEC WELCOMES GARY NOUSE AS INSTRUCTOR



Gary Nouse

As the propane industry continues to face workforce challenges and increasing safety demands, training programs must evolve to prepare employees faster — without sacrificing quality.

In 2025, the Pennsylvania Petroleum Association Technical Education Center (PPATEC) opened a new trade school located in Grantville, Pennsylvania, with the intent of being a regional hub for a hands-on propane training program. PPATEC announced that Gary Nouse will lead both the strategic direction and instructional offerings for propane curriculum at PPATEC. Nouse brings four decades of industry experience to help him expand a more targeted and modular approach to providing propane training solutions for industry stakeholders. Nouse began his career in entry-level positions, coating DOT cylinders, working as a

service and installer technician and driving a bobtail. Over his career, he advanced through nearly every position in the field, developing a comprehensive understanding of propane operations, safety protocols and the challenges faced by both new hires and seasoned professionals. Today, he also serves in leadership roles within multiple propane industry trade associations. At PPATEC, Nouse is helping build out training that aligns directly with the job-specific, modular philosophy behind PERC's Propane Education Program, or PEP. By breaking instruction into smaller, focused modules, students are better able to retain critical information, while employers benefit from higher course completion rates and a faster path from hiring to productivity. Individuals will use a full scope of propane equipment at PPATEC in a controlled environment to mirror what they see in a field application.

MID-FEBRUARY PROPANE PRICES UP FROM JANUARY

During the latest mid-month period, prices at Mont Belvieu, Texas, increased. The posted prices increased 2.25 cents/gal from January mid-month to February mid-month, while the spot prices increased 2.625 cents. Conway, Kansas, postings increased 4.185 cents/gal, and spots increased 3.5 cents over the month. The Mont Belvieu mid-January posted price was 73 cents/gal. The next week the price increased 4.25 cents to 77.25 cents/gal, followed by a 0.875-cent increase to 78.125 cents/gal. Postings decreased 0.875 cents to 77.25 cents/gal the first week of February. At mid-month, postings decreased 2 cents to 75.25 cents/gal. Compared to the same time in February 2025, the February 2026 prices were 29.814 cents lower. The Conway mid-January posted price was 64.685 cents/gal. The next week the price increased 3.185 cents to 67.87 cents/gal, followed by a 3.5-cent increase to 71.37 cents/gal. Postings decreased 1.06 cents to 70.31 cents/gal the first week of February. At mid-month, postings decreased 1.44 cents to 68.87 cents/gal. Compared to the same time in February 2025, the February 2026 prices

were 32.156 cents lower. Mont Belvieu spots opened mid-January at 57.875 cents/gal. The next week the price increased by 7.125 cents to 65 cents/gal, followed by a 1-cent increase to 66 cents/gal the next week. Spots decreased 4 cents to 62 cents/gal the first week of February. At mid-month, they decreased 1.5 cents to 60.5 cents/gal. Compared to the same time in February 2025, the February 2026 prices were 31 cents lower. Conway spots opened mid-January at 56 cents/gal. The next week the price increased 3.75 cents to 59.75 cents/gal, followed by a 3.5-cent increase to 63.25 cents/gal the next week. Spots decreased 3.75 cents to 59.5 cents/gal the first week of February. At mid-month, they remained flat at 59.5 cents/gal. Compared to the same time in February 2025, the February 2026 prices were 31 cents lower.

CARGAS ACQUIRES MYFUELPORTAL CUSTOMER PORTAL FROM SILVERLINE SOLUTIONS

Cargas, a provider of back-office software solutions for fuel delivery and HVAC service companies, acquired Silverline Solutions' MyFuelPortal, a customer portal technology that enhances the end-consumer experience for Cargas Energy customers. This acquisition is part of Cargas Energy's ongoing commitment to expanding its offerings and providing the best possible service to its customers. Cargas has had a strong relationship with Silverline for many years, and this acquisition is a testament to the long-time collaboration between the two companies. The acquisition is of the MyFuelPortal customer engagement platform only and does not include Silverline's hosting business or other managed IT services. Silverline will also continue to host and provide infrastructure support for MyFuelPortal and will work closely with the Cargas team to ensure a seamless transition for all companies using MyFuelPortal.

SUBURBAN PROPANE EXECUTIVE PROMOTION ADVANCES RENEWABLE ENERGY STRATEGY

Suburban Propane Partners L.P., a nationwide distributor of propane,

renewable propane, renewable natural gas, fuel oil, and related products and services, announced a Suburban Propane executive promotion to further its long-term strategy of developing the partnership's renewable energy platform.



M. Douglas Dagan

The company announced that M. Douglas Dagan has been promoted to senior vice president – renewable energy. In this newly created position, Dagan is responsible for the

development and execution of the strategic growth plan for Suburban Propane's renewable energy platform, under its subsidiary, Suburban Renewable Energy LLC ("Suburban Renewables"), as well as overseeing the operations. Suburban Renewables houses three owned and operated anaerobic digester facilities that produce renewable natural gas in Stanfield, Arizona; Columbus, Ohio; and upstate New York, and also includes investments in Oberon Fuels and Independence Hydrogen.

CAVAGNA GROUP OPENS SUBSIDIARY CAVAGNA GROUP JAPAN



Satoshi Nakashima

The Cavagna Group is strengthening its presence in the east with the opening of a new subsidiary in Japan. Though not a new market for the company, Cavagna

Group has recognized the

region's strategic importance with significant potential for growth and development. Based in the capital Tokyo, Cavagna Group Japan will operate as a distribution and commercial structure, representing a strategic hub for all the company's business lines and directly supporting local activities and customers. Leading the subsidiary's operations is Satoshi Nakashima, director and business development manager. The same project is also highlighted by Rino Cavagna, executive vice president of sales at Cavagna Group. Cavagna Group Japan is part of a structured project aimed at diversifying and strengthening the company's presence across multiple sectors and territories. 📌

Industry Calendar

March 10-11 Colorado PGA Spring Membership Meeting
npga.org
Golden, CO

March 11 Western PGA Capitol Day
westernpga.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

March 22-24 Virginia PGA Spring Membership Meeting
vapga.org
Richmond, VA

March 22-25 New York PGA Spring Conference and Annual Meeting
nypropane.com
Albany, NY

March 24-26 Rocky Mountain PGA Spring Meeting
rmpropane.org
Donley, ID

March 25 New Jersey PGA Spring Board of Directors Meeting
njpga.org
New Brunswick, NJ

March 27 Pennsylvania PGA Spring Membership Meeting
papropane.com
Hershey, PA

March 30-31 Mid-Atlantic PGA Spring Meeting
npga.org
Annapolis, MD

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

May 17-20 Eastern Energy Expo
easternenergyexpo.com
Uncasville, CT

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2026



From Family Legacy to Industry Leadership:

How This Propane Retailer Powers Ahead with Otodata: “It’s the most reliable technology we’ve ever used.”

The world’s most affordable and accurate tank monitoring solution doesn’t just measure levels — it reshapes how fuel marketers operate. For millions of energy providers, Otodata’s technology has become the backbone of a modern delivery model, turning reactive will call customers into proactive, efficient automatic deliveries.

More than a decade ago, Otodata recognized that modernization in the industry was slow and often cost prohibitive. Today, we are one of the largest tank monitoring manufacturers in the world, known for pairing industry-leading reliability with a low cost of ownership that makes full fleet deployment achievable for operations of every size.

And in places where reliability isn’t optional — like the harsh winters of Northern Wisconsin and Michigan’s Upper Peninsula — that performance becomes mission critical. Few companies understand this better than Ritchie Lakeland Oil Company.

For more than 50 years, Ritchie Lakeland Oil Company has built its reputation on dependability. What began as a single storefront in 1969 has grown into a multilocation operation serving more than

28,000 customers across 10 sites. Through every chapter of growth, one thing has remained constant: commitment to service, community and doing right by the families who rely on them.

MONITORING THAT MATCHES THEIR MISSION

When temperatures plunge below zero, precision matters. Before partnering with Otodata, remote monitoring was a constant frustration. “We had 1,000 monitors out, and you could count on two hands how many were actually reading,” recalls Matt Ritchie, third-generation leader and operations manager for Ritchie Lakeland Oil Company.

THE OTODATA IMPACT

- *Fewer runouts:* Winter weekends once meant 50-plus emergency calls. Now it’s fewer than five — all from unmonitored customers.
- *Greater efficiency:* With monitors on all tanks, the company is already 80% monitored and pushing toward 100%.
- *Customer confidence:* “We use monitors as a no run out guarantee,” Ritchie says. “Anytime you can say ‘guarantee,’ you’re giving customers peace of mind.”

Ritchie credits Otodata’s unmatched signal strength and long battery life for transforming their operations. “It’s the most reliable technology we’ve ever used.”

GROWING SMARTER. STAYING TRUE.

Looking ahead, Ritchie is focused on continuous improvement and smart technology that helps his team work more efficiently. His six children are already showing interest in the family business — two even help on weekends.

He’s watching broader energy trends, from electrification to evolving efficiency standards, but one thing remains constant: the family’s commitment to its legacy.

“When your name is on the side of the truck, you do whatever it takes to protect that legacy.”

RELIABLE ROOTS. SMARTER FUTURE.

For Ritchie Lakeland Oil Company, tradition and technology work hand in hand — powering safer homes, stronger communities and a future built on trust. Otodata Remote Tank Monitors help make that possible, turning reliability into measurable results, one tank at a time.



JOIN FUEL MARKETERS ACROSS NORTH AMERICA WHO TRUST OTODATA TO POWER AUTOMATIC DELIVERIES.

Discover how Otodata’s affordable, proven tank monitoring technology can help reduce runouts, improve margins, and strengthen customer relationships.

Request a demo at Otodata.com or reach us at info@otodata.com, 844-763-3344



Whitney Parsley is an associate at the mergers and acquisitions [M&A] advisory firm Cetane Associates and specializes in M&A and corporate governance. Contact Parsley at wparsley@cetane.com. Visit cetane.com.

IF YOU COULD HAVE 1 SUPERPOWER IN THIS LIFE, WHAT WOULD IT BE & WHY?

Enriching the lives of others & valuing the time we have in this world are powers the propane industry most appreciates

This month's question makes a return from four years ago, but it truly falls into the category of an "oldie but a goodie."

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

PRACTICAL & BOLD POWERS

I once read about a hypothetical superpower: the ability to refill anything. A propane tank running low? Refilled. A bank balance that could use a boost? Restored. On the surface, it sounds like the ultimate solution — practical, efficient and endlessly useful. But as with any superpower, benefits can carry unintended consequences. Coworkers disrupting your day? Refill their email inbox. A dinner guest makes an ill-timed comment? Refill their bladder when they return from the bathroom! The power to replenish, it turns out, can be just as disruptive as it is helpful when placed in the wrong hands. Every advantage

carries responsibility, and every solution demands thoughtful application.

LUCY SCHAFFER

SHAFFER'S BOTTLED GAS INC.
HOOVERVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

My superpower would be strategic foresight: the ability to see second- and third-order consequences clearly and early. Why? I value defensibility first — not vibes, not hype. I want reasonable positions when things get messy. I like high-probability analysis and confidence levels because I value decision quality over speed of decision making. I tend to think in systems: 'If I do X, what breaks? Who reacts? What happens next quarter or next year, not just today or next week?' What this means in practice: I want to spot hidden risks in 'good ideas' before they become expensive lessons. I want to make decisions that quietly compound instead of options that look smart but decay over time. I want to know when not to act — which often may be more valuable than action. Why not flashier powers? Flashier powers like super-

intelligence or time control are blunt instruments. Foresight is sharper and aligns with how I already try to operate: calm, structured and a little allergic to chaos masquerading as opportunity.

CHRIS CAYWOOD

CAYWOOD PROPANE GAS INC.
DELRAY BEACH, FLORIDA

If I could have one superpower, since I have always had poor vision, I would ask for supernatural eyesight. But not just in the physical. I would also ask for it in a spiritual sense. Not only to have twenty-twenty vision for my eyes, but to be able to look at someone or something and be able to see good! In this world where there's so much negative, I want to see the light and life in people and situations. See good, be good, do good.

JUDY TARANOVIC

PROCTOR GAS INC.
PROCTOR, VERMONT

If I could choose any superpower, it would easily be the ability to breathe underwater. A couple of months ago,



I went snorkeling in Hawaii, and it reminded me that there is an entire world of absolute breathtaking beauty beneath the waves. I've always been drawn to the ocean. Being near the water brings me such a sense of calm and clarity. With this power, I could ditch any snorkel gear and spend forever 'playing mermaids' and exploring the peaceful wonders of the water!

STEPH HENNE
LAKES GAS CO.
WYOMING, MINNESOTA

Definitely time travel, although I am unsure if that would fall under superpower or scientific breakthrough. But to be able to go back and learn from all the great thinkers of the past would be amazing while blowing their mind with my iPhone.

ROBERT KENNEY
METS
MCCALLUM, TEXAS

My superpower would be endless energy. I would never have to sleep to recharge my mind and regenerate my body. Every superhero has to have a great costume. I imagine mine to look like something

'Emily in Paris' would wear. The perfect outfit for every occasion.

JULIE JOHNSON
TED JOHNSON PROPANE
BALDWIN PARK, CALIFORNIA

MORE TIME TO DO GOOD

If I could have one superpower, it would be to teleport anywhere at any time. I love to travel; my superpower would allow me to bring people with me, and I would travel the world with my family. I could visit the mountains one day and then the beach the next, all on the weekend and still be back at work on Monday. No more sitting in traffic or dealing with airports!

TREVOR BEAUDRY
BEAUDRY OIL & PROPANE
ELK RIVER, MINNESOTA

If I could have one superpower, it would be the ability to make another person's hurt or bad situation either go away or at least be more tolerable. That doesn't always mean the illness or the situation is always solved or healed. Not all hurt is bad. But there are times when you want to help someone you love or a dear friend and mere words seem shallow. I would

request one caveat with this superpower, and that is it comes with the cloak of total anonymity. True love or friendship never requires repayment or recognition.

DANIEL R. RICHARDSON
CONGER LP GAS INC.
TIFTON, GEORGIA

One superpower I'd love to have is the ability to always feel rested, no matter how little sleep I get. Being able to feel refreshed and energized all the time would make life so much easier. I could push through a long, exhausting day at work and still come home with plenty of energy for my family. I would love that!

CHARLIE CRISWELL
CRISWELL PROPANE INC.
GRINNELL, IOWA

If I could choose a superpower, it would be teleportation. I absolutely love to travel, but not the actual traveling part. Being able to teleport would let me see more of the world without the time and hassle. Less time commuting would also mean more time with my family, which is the most important thing to me. I could have breakfast beignets in New Orleans, visit my family out of state whenever

I wanted to pop over to a warm beach, which sounds especially tempting after the winter we have been having in the Northeast.

STACI RAMMEL
WOODRUFF ENERGY
BRIDGETON, NEW JERSEY

If I could have one superpower in this life, I would choose the ability to pause time. My daughter is seven months old, and these past seven months have flown by more quickly than I anticipated. I'm so glad she's growing, but I'd love to be able just to press pause every now and then.

KIRSTEN U. MCALPIN
CONGER LP GAS INC.
TIFTON, GEORGIA

I never thought of having a superpower. However, if I was able to have one, it would likely be to make people calm and happy. There is tons of stuff in our lives today. Maybe people are overwhelmed daily by a variety of elements. Life

balance is important to be a happy person. We live in a world of instant and 'in your face' information. Some we like, and some we don't. I see friends and families being divided by politics and social issues. This causes stress. People feel like they have to respond to everything. I don't think that is a healthy way of life. We all need to reflect on what's important to us and not get sucked into the craziness. If I could make people calm and take more vacations, it might be a better place for all of us. We are only on this earth for a short time. Focus on what is important to you and your loved ones.

ED VARNEY
TOPLINE MANAGEMENT LLC
MCKINNEY, TEXAS

To slow time in order to appreciate things more and smell the flowers for what they are. Today's world moves at hyper speed, and we work hard to keep up. Slowing down to appreciate the good things in

life would be a superpower in itself.

MIKE DODD
PROPANE NINJA
TAMPA, FLORIDA

'Beam me up, Scotty.' I would love the superpower of quickly being able to transport from one place to another. It would be amazing to go visit customers and family with the push of a button!

ABBY THURSTON
RURAL COMPUTER CONSULTANTS
BIRD ISLAND, MINNESOTA

BEYOND THE SUPERPOWER

As varied as these answers are, the reasons behind them are strikingly similar. They reflect a shared desire to be more present, to connect more deeply, to care for others and to experience life with greater meaning and intention. ■

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.

ODOR FADE LITIGATION: PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE — PART 1

The rise of 'failure to warn' & product liability lawsuits against propane companies

In August 1987, I tried a lawsuit in Macon, Georgia. Although I had tried many lawsuits by this point in my career, this was my first time defending a propane distributor. It also happened to be the first lawsuit in the country to go to trial alleging a brand-new type of claim against the propane industry — “odor fade,” or the notion that propane can lose its distinctive odor before it gets to the customer, rendering it undetectable in the event of a leak.

I lost that case, but in the years to come, I would win many more as the industry took action to respond to this attack on the odorization of propane. How did plaintiffs' lawyers and experts develop the odor fade theory, and how did they exploit it to win significant verdicts and settlements? What actions did the propane industry take to counter this theory in the courtroom? How did new technologies alter odor fade claims? And where does the industry stand today in defending odor fade lawsuits?

Over the next three months, we will address these questions in this column and many others as we trace the long history of this attack on the industry.

ROTTEN EGG ODOR

So, let's start with the basics. Virtually all readers of this column understand

that, in its natural state, propane is odorless and colorless. This means that a dangerous propane leak could go undetected in the absence of some warning or signal to people in the area that there is danger. In its early days, the propane industry focused on finding a chemical that could safely be added to propane to act as a warning signal.

In 1931, the United States Bureau of Mines published research designed to identify chemical compounds that could be added to gas (both propane and natural gas) to provide a distinct, unpleasant odor to warn of a gas leak before it reached an explosive concentration in air. Many compounds were analyzed, but sulfur compounds such as ethyl mercaptan were identified as a highly effective warning agent because of their distinctive “rotten egg” odor. Researchers found that this type of odor triggered an instant “danger” response in humans.

REACTION WITH RUST

Ethyl mercaptan was especially appropriate for use as a gas odorant because it could be detected at minute levels (parts per billion) that were far below a concentration of gas in air that was flammable. And ethyl mercaptan had another advantage: Because propane is

stored under pressure as a liquid but used as a vapor, it is essential that a propane odorant that is added must, as closely as possible, vaporize at the same rate as propane. Ethyl mercaptan outperformed all other candidates in this regard.

And so, in short order, ethyl mercaptan became the odorant of choice for the propane industry. However, problems lurked on the horizon. For one thing, mercaptans — especially ethyl mercaptan — tended to react with rust (such as might be found on the inside of a steel propane tank) to produce an allegedly less odorous compound. In addition, mercaptan chemicals could be potentially filtered out of odorized gas as it passed through certain types of soils after an underground leak, thus reducing the odor of the gas.

LITIGATION REVOLUTION

These potential issues remained in the background for decades, but that would change by the 1980s. Several things happened. First, of course, is the litigation revolution that began to sweep the United States starting in the 1960s and 1970s, prompted in part by court decisions establishing the concept of product liability. In addition, courts at this time made it much easier to make claims of “failure to warn” regarding the



PRODUCT LIABILITY

alleged defects of a product. Personal injury lawsuits became much more prevalent and much easier to win.

Second, in the late 1970s, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission investigated a series of incidents in which appliance heater control valves failed, often resulting in serious personal injuries to consumers attempting to relight a pilot light that had gone out. The valves were designed to shut off the flow of gas to the main appliance burner if the standing pilot light is extinguished, but they had an unfortunate tendency to stick in the open position.

This led to a potentially dangerous scenario: (1) an appliance pilot light goes out, (2) the control valve sticks in the open position, allowing unburned gas to flow into the area of the appliance through the main appliance burner, and (3) the consumer attempts to light the pilot and unwittingly ignites the gas that had flowed through the burner.

TEAM OF EXPERTS

The defective control valves were recalled, and plaintiffs' lawyers took advantage of the relatively new product liability laws to sue the manufacturers on behalf of injured plaintiffs. The propane supplier was often drawn into these lawsuits because inevitably the injured

consumer claimed he or she did not smell gas before attempting to light the pilot light. The control valve manufacturers, who really had no defense to these suits, certainly welcomed an additional defendant to share the risk, and perhaps they even promoted the odor fade theory (and experts who espoused it) to find an extra defendant to share the risk of potentially defective products.

In short order, the plaintiffs' lawyers had a team of experts to focus on the rare situations where ethyl mercaptan odor was depleted by rust or soil and to argue that this must have been the reason why consumers smelled no odor when attempting to light a pilot light. They coined the term "odor fade" to describe this, claiming this rendered ethyl mercaptan "defective" as a propane odorant.

'CONSPIRACY'

The plaintiffs' experts also pointed to a controversial 1977 study conducted by the Bartlesville Energy Research Center. This study attempted to replicate "real-world conditions" to assess whether ethyl mercaptan and several other potential odorants would actually be smelled and recognized as a warning in "everyday settings." Plaintiff experts said it established another "defect" of ethyl

mercaptan as a warning agent, while defendants argued forcefully that it was "junk science." Regardless, it was another log on the fire that the plaintiffs' lawyers were building.

However, the most damaging aspect of the new odor fade theory was the "failure to warn" claim. Plaintiffs argued that the propane marketers had "known for years" that ethyl mercaptan could be affected by certain types of rust and soils but failed to warn their customers about the potential hazard. They presented this to juries as a "conspiracy to hide the truth" from consumers. In fact, they contended customer safety brochures that were used at the time actively misled customers by implying that if there was a dangerous leak, they would always smell the warning odor.

By the late 1980s, the litigation revolution that had started several decades was roaring. And by the late 1980s and early 1990s, the odor fade attack on the propane industry was in full swing. Large verdicts and settlements abounded as propane marketers were ill-equipped to mount an effective defense, especially to the failure to warn claims.

Next month's column will examine the industry's response over the next decade — to be continued. 📌

NAVIGATING THE SHIFT FROM CETP TO PEP: HOW TO KEEP YOUR FIELD TEAM COMPLIANT IN A CHANGING REGULATORY LANDSCAPE

As CETP sunsets & PEP rolls out, propane marketers must reassess training, documentation & licensing requirements to keep field teams compliant

BY BRENT CAMMETT



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As a more than 30-year veteran of the propane industry and a director of safety and compliance, I have rarely seen a transition as significant as the sunset of the Propane Education & Research Council's (PERC) Certified Employee Training Program (CETP). The phased introduction of the Propane Education Program (PEP) represents much more than a rebranding. It is overhauling the way propane marketers across the United States must approach their training, documentation and daily procedures.

For propane marketers, the challenge is twofold: maintaining compliance with state and federal requirements while ensuring that every technician, driver and customer service representative (CSR) has the skills, credentials and confidence to operate safely. Understanding the road map from CETP to PEP and how it impacts employees' roles is key to a smooth transition. At this point, it's important to distinguish and understand which combination of PEP and CETP courses your employees will need for their job and/or state licensing.

FROM CETP TO PEP: UNDERSTANDING THE ROAD MAP

Since the beginning of my career, PERC's CETP has been the industry's cornerstone for propane safety and workforce training. CETP standardized instruction across core job functions, including delivery, installations, plant operations and service work, helping to ensure those handling propane and its equipment had consistent safety knowledge no matter where in the country they were located.

Now that the requirements and standards are changing to PEP, however, propane marketers are facing changes and standards they must work to keep up with. Few have yet invested the time and energy to stay up to date with the shifts and fluctuations we are seeing under the PEP system thus far.

Key differences in the CETP-to-PEP transition include:

- **Varying training delivery methods:** PEP courses are designed around specific job tasks, altering the learning paths that technicians,

drivers, CSRs and managers are expected to follow. This varies from CETP, which combined classroom learning, field training and hands-on training as the structure to this education. While hands-on learning has historically been successful in our industry, PEP focuses more on online modules and knowledge assessments, which may be more challenging for technicians and delivery drivers to grasp due to its dramatic difference from being out in the field and applying the knowledge.

- **Adjusted proficiency tracking:** PEP incorporates skill verification built into the program, changing the way marketers track their employee training. They will have to adjust their documentation and recordkeeping to track, qualify and record new PEP training modules, including when and by whom they were completed.

While CETP certification remains valid until its expiration, PERC's rollout of PEP signals a new direction that will

soon overshadow former requirements and bring to light new ones marketers are expected to comply with. For propane retailers, now is the time to assess where their teams stand and develop a transition strategy.

STATES WITH LICENSING REQUIREMENTS

Various states have specific and unique licensing and operator qualification requirements tied to CETP credentials. For marketers operating in states that require formal licensing, such as in the Northeast, this ever-evolving transition carries additional weight. The sunset of CETP brings about questions surrounding how these states will recognize or integrate PEP standards.

Regulatory bodies in each state are working with PERC to define how PEP credits and competency verification align with existing licensing expectations. However, the interpretation of these new standards varies by state and, in some cases, by local jurisdiction. This is one of many reasons why it's essential for propane marketers to stay closely engaged with internal or third-party safety consultants to avoid compliance gaps and risk to their customers, employees and company.

If your business operates in a state that mandates CETP completion for licensing, you'll need to adjust your employee training road map accordingly. Working with a compliance partner who understands both CETP's legacy structure and PEP's evolving criteria can make this process far more manageable. A third-party safety provider can help you navigate those requirements and align your training plan with the new PEP framework to maintain regulatory compliance without disruption.

STATES WITHOUT LICENSE REQUIREMENTS

For propane marketers in states without licensing requirements, a propane safety trainer can still help propane marketers navigate the shift to PEP as well as provide hands-on training for your field

teams. Technicians learn best in hands-on situations, which is why I encourage everyone to get out of the office and experience real-world training on the jobsite. This can help improve retention and prompt questions and answers that would not necessarily come up in a classroom setting. Hands-on training is particularly important for high-skill, high-liability positions such as plant operators, delivery drivers and service technicians.

While PEP's flexibility allows online learning to handle much of the theoretical instruction, live classroom or field sessions continue to provide the best environment for team-based learning, situational safety practice and problem-solving.

By combining PEP learning modules with tailored field instruction and skill verification, a safety trainer can help ensure that propane marketers like you help their teams meet both the letter and spirit of compliance. This blended training approach reduces accidents, strengthens company culture and helps employees feel more confident in their daily responsibilities. It also helps customers feel more confident in your employees' ability to manage their propane system and communicate important safety information effectively.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR PROPANE LEARNING PATHS

Some states are already offering pilot programs of PEP, while others are still finalizing how to link new training to existing licensing frameworks. This makes 2026 a pivotal year for propane marketers and their training managers alike. Staying proactive will significantly help to protect your business from potential compliance interruptions and ensure field employees don't lose momentum in their training progress. Reviewing your current training records, identifying which CETP credentials are expiring and planning migration to the equivalent PEP modules will help you stay one step ahead of the ever-changing landscape.

PERC's rollout of PEP signals a new direction that will soon overshadow former requirements.

These rapid changes also emphasize the importance of having a dedicated compliance assessment process — a road map that evaluates your company's current training alignment, identifies upcoming gaps and plans an orderly transition to PEP. I recommend contacting a third-party safety expert for this service, as they can come in with fresh eyes and outside knowledge to identify and prioritize areas of your training, compliance, reporting and documentation that have room for improvement.

MAKE THE TRANSITION SMOOTH & SAFE

Propane marketers now have a unique opportunity to modernize training, strengthen safety culture and simplify compliance tracking across their operations and locations. The key is early action and informed guidance from a propane safety expert who is comfortable keeping up with the changing licensure.

Reach out to your preferred propane safety professional today to start the conversation. Every business has a different training footprint, and your road map to compliance should reflect your size, structure and state-specific regulations.

With the right strategy and support, your company can lead the way safely and confidently into the next generation of propane workforce training. 📌

Brent Cammett is the director of safety and training services at P3 Propane Safety. He can be reached at brent_cammett@bostonenv.com or p3propane.com.



THE 2026 GUIDE TO CAREER PATHING

Your 4-step framework for
technical & field-based workforces

BY LINDA GINAC

Career pathing has become a critical workforce practice across industries, especially those that rely on skilled, certified and field-based employees. As organizations face shifting skills and an aging workforce, the ability to help employees see a future inside the company has become a business imperative.

Career pathing provides a structured way for employees to understand how they can grow, what skills matter most and how increased capability connects to business needs. While the concept applies to any organization, it is particularly relevant in industries where work is hands-on and heavily influenced by certification, licensing and experience rather than traditional office titles.

This guide outlines a practical approach to career pathing that works across industries, with examples that translate easily to technical and field-based roles such as service technicians, drivers, plant operators and supervisors.

WHAT CAREER PATHING MEANS

Career pathing is a structured process that helps employees navigate growth within an organization by connecting skills, experience and opportunity rather than only focusing on promotions. Career pathing emphasizes skill progression and expanded responsibility.

In many technical industries, career advancement does not follow a simple ladder. Growth may involve earning new certifications, taking on more complex equipment, mentoring others or moving into administrative or leadership roles. Career pathing makes these options visible and attainable. At its core, career pathing aligns three things: what the business needs, what the role requires and how an employee develops over time.

WHY CAREER PATHING MATTERS FOR FIELD-BASED WORKFORCES

Employees today want clarity. They want to know what comes next and what it takes to get there. When that clarity is missing, frustration grows and employee turnover follows.

In field-based industries, this challenge is often amplified. Roles are physically demanding, regulatory requirements are strict and experience matters deeply. Without clear pathways, employees may assume the only way forward is to leave. Effective career pathing helps organizations:

- Retain skilled workers by showing long-term opportunity
- Build internal pipelines for hard-to-replace roles
- Reduce risk by ensuring skills and certifications are planned with intention

For employees, career pathing replaces guesswork with direction. It shows how hands-on expertise can evolve into mastery, leadership or specialized roles that add value to both the individual and the organization.

MOVING BEYOND THE LINEAR CAREER LADDER

Traditional career models assume a

straight, upward climb. In reality, most careers today look more like networks than ladders. In technical environments, lateral moves are often as valuable as vertical ones. A service technician may deepen expertise by working on specialized systems. A driver may move into safety coordination. A field supervisor may rotate through operations planning before leading a team.

Career pathing embraces this reality by offering multiple routes forward. It allows employees to broaden or deepen their skills while staying aligned with business needs.

Step 1: Identify Organizational & Workforce Needs

The first step in career pathing is understanding where the organization is headed and which roles and skills are critical to get there.

This requires looking at workforce data, retirement risk, certification requirements and operational bottlenecks. It also means listening to employees. What roles do they aspire to? Where do they feel stuck? What skills do they want to develop?

For example, an organization may identify a growing need for senior technicians who can handle complex installations and train others. Career pathing then becomes a way to intentionally develop that capability rather than hoping it appears when it's needed.

Step 2: Build a Competency-Based Framework

Career pathing works best when roles are defined by skills and competencies rather than vague titles.

A competency-based framework groups roles into job families that share similar capabilities. Each role is defined by the skills, certifications and experience required to perform it effectively.

In a field-based context, competencies may include equipment knowledge, safety compliance, problem-solving, customer interaction or leadership

readiness. Employees can clearly see what is required to move from one role to another.

This clarity benefits both sides. Employees know what to work toward. Organizations gain consistency in expectations and development.

Step 3: Equip Employees With Practical Career Tools

Career pathing should be visible and usable, not buried in policy documents.

Effective programs give employees access to clear career maps that show possible roles and the skills required for each. These tools help employees assess where they are today and what steps come next.

Skill assessments can highlight gaps and guide development plans. Learning opportunities may include on-the-job training, mentoring, certification programs or cross-training assignments.

Flexibility matters. Not every employee learns the same way. Some benefit most from hands-on experience, while others thrive with structured instruction. Career pathing should accommodate both.

Step 4: Communicate, Train & Measure

Career pathing succeeds only when it is clearly communicated and consistently supported.

Employees need to understand how the process works and how it benefits them. Managers must be trained to have meaningful career conversations and to support development without fear of losing talent.

Measurement is essential. Organizations should track participation, internal mobility, engagement and retention. Feedback should inform adjustments as business needs evolve.

Career pathing is not a one-time rollout. It is an ongoing system that grows with the workforce.

THE ROLE OF MANAGERS IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Managers play a central role in career

pathing, especially in field-based environments where daily work closely shapes skill development.

When managers understand career paths, they can coach employees more effectively. They can assign stretch opportunities, recommend training and recognize progress.

Organizations that equip managers with clear frameworks and tools see stronger engagement and better outcomes. Employees are more likely to believe in career pathing when their direct leaders actively support it.

BUILDING A CULTURE OF GROWTH

Career pathing works best when it is part of the organization's culture rather than a separate initiative.

This means encouraging regular career conversations, recognizing skill development and reinforcing that growth can take many forms. Advancement does not always mean leaving the field. It can

mean becoming an expert, a mentor or a leader in safety and quality.

When employees see that development is valued, they are more likely to invest in their own growth and stay committed to the organization.

CAREER PATHING AS A STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

For organizations, career pathing is more than an employee benefit. It is a strategic tool. It helps address skills gaps, prepare future leaders and reduce reliance on external hiring. It creates a workforce that is adaptable, engaged and prepared for change.

For employees, career pathing provides ownership. It replaces uncertainty with a clear map and shows how today's effort leads to tomorrow's opportunity.

LOOKING AHEAD

As industries continue to evolve, career pathing will remain essential for

attracting, developing and retaining skilled talent. Organizations that invest in clear, skill-based pathways send a powerful message to their workforce: There is a future here.

By focusing on competencies, communication and continuous development, career pathing can transform how employees and organizations grow together. ▀

Linda Ginac is a workforce strategist and CEO with decades of experience advising organizations on talent development, internal mobility and workforce readiness. She is recognized for her leadership in advancing skills-based career growth, succession planning and practical approaches to employee development. Visit talentguard.com.



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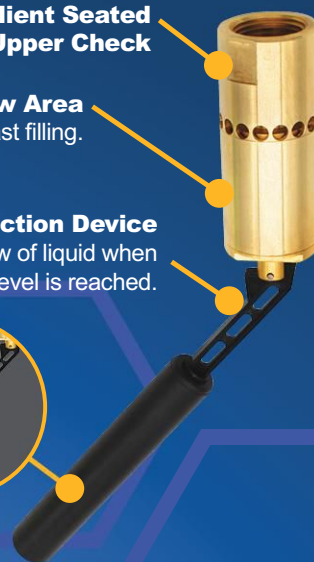
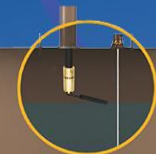
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TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION: WHY HVACR TECHNICAL COLLEGES MUST LEAD THE SHIFT TO PROPANE-POWERED INNOVATION

Manufacturers like Stone Mountain Technologies are paving the way for cross-industry workforce development

BY HEIDI BLADE



A gas absorption heat pump is installed at the College of DuPage in Illinois. Images courtesy of Stone Mountain Technologies.

As the heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration (HVACR) industry accelerates toward decarbonization and high-efficiency heating solutions, one question grows increasingly urgent: Who will train the workforce capable of installing, commissioning and maintaining the next generation of low-carbon, propane-powered technologies?

Across the country, propane — not electricity alone — is emerging as a renewable-ready, highly efficient energy source capable of meaningful emissions reductions and outstanding real-world performance. But the speed at which this technology scales depends on one essential link.

HVACR TECHNICAL COLLEGES & TRADE SCHOOLS

With access to live equipment, hands-on installation opportunities and strong support from industry leaders, these institutions can become the driving force behind the adoption of propane-fueled emerging technologies. One standout example — the gas absorption heat pump (GAHP) installation at the College of DuPage (COD) — demonstrates what is possible when the right partners align. Through a partnership with Stone Mountain Technologies Inc. (SMTI), the company behind the

Anesi brand of gas absorption heat pumps, we can demonstrate how this model allows for effective and practical training as this technology's place in the energy sector grows.

WHY PROPANE TECHNOLOGY BELONGS IN TODAY'S HVACR CLASSROOMS

Decarbonization goals are reshaping the built environment, yet millions of buildings — particularly in rural, off-grid or mixed fuel areas — cannot rely exclusively on electric heating.

That's where propane-powered technologies, particularly gas absorption heat pumps, fill a critical gap with advantages that are increasingly important:

1. Superior Efficiency Performance

GAHPs leverage a thermally driven cycle that delivers efficiency exceeding 100%, outperforming traditional gas furnaces and certain electric heat pumps in cold-climate conditions.

2. Major Emissions Reductions

The high efficiency of GAHPs directly reduces emissions, helping building owners, utilities and states meet aggressive climate targets without sacrificing reliability.

3. Environmentally Responsible Operation

GAHP systems consume significantly less fuel, reduce total

energy demand and operate with zero global warming potential, zero ozone depletion potential and zero PFAS, reducing environmental impact.

4. A Massive Workforce Skills Gap

Contractors trained exclusively in conventional gas furnaces or standard electric heat pumps are not yet prepared to service propane-fueled systems. The schools that address this gap now have the potential to become the engines of tomorrow's HVACR workforce.

SETTING A NEW STANDARD FOR TRAINING

The College of DuPage's installation of a gas absorption heat pump transformed a traditional HVACR course into a full, real-world construction and commissioning project. As a result of SMTI's leadership and hands-on support, students gained experience that typically takes years to achieve in the field.

Students participated in:

- Performing full-site assessments
- Rerouting gas and electrical infrastructure
- Setting and mounting outdoor equipment
- Managing installation logistics
- Commissioning the GAHP system
- Analyzing live performance data

This was not a lab demonstration — it was a true, outdoor, operational installation on a functioning building.

Today, COD serves not only as a training center for HVACR students but also as a working technology showcase for contractors, utilities, manufacturer representatives and trade allies looking to understand where propane-powered heating is headed. Through COD's partnership with SMTI, this model is replicable for other use cases.

WHY PROPANE INDUSTRY LEADERS SHOULD CARE

Industry-leading organizations — associations, foundations, propane marketers, distributors and original equipment manufacturer partners — recognize that propane must have a



strong presence in decarbonization strategies. Stone Mountain Technologies places high importance on advancing this message.

For the industry to scale propane-powered innovation, leaders must:

- Invest in HVACR workforce development
- Support schools prepared to execute live installation projects
- Highlight propane as a future-focused, sustainability-aligned energy source

Projects like the COD installation show that, with the right partners, technical colleges can become regional hubs for propane innovation, shaping thousands of future technicians and influencing market acceptance at scale.

A CALL TO ACTION FOR HVACR TECHNICAL COLLEGES

Schools seeking to lead the next era of HVACR education can take a page from the COD-SMTI partnership:

1. Build partnerships early.

Engage with propane associations, utilities and manufacturers whose expertise and equipment support are central to successful GAHP deployment.

2. Create real installation projects — not just simulations.

Students require outdoor, code-compliant, operational installations to develop job-ready confidence and skills.

3. Work closely with facilities teams.

COD overcame internal hesitation by clearly communicating the long-term benefits for the campus and the broader HVACR community.

4. Document and share your success.

Early adopters should present at HVACR conferences and expos to drive national momentum for propane technology education.

WHY NOW?

Propane-powered heating technologies are advancing rapidly, and their success depends on a trained workforce capable of installing and servicing them. HVACR educators — particularly technical colleges — are uniquely positioned to make cutting-edge propane technology part of mainstream training.

The COD project proved that schools could do far more than teach emerging technology — they can demonstrate it, test it, expand it and lead the industry forward. ▀

For an additional Q&A with the Propane Education & Research Council on cross-industry training opportunities, visit bpnews.com/training.

Heidi Blade is a strategic communicator and technical marketing professional specializing in the B2B space, recognized for translating complex engineering concepts into clear, compelling product and market narratives. As marketing manager for North America at Stone Mountain Technologies, she leads cross-functional initiatives that blend project coordination, technical content development and data-driven marketing strategy to advance market adoption and customer engagement. Blade holds a Master's of Business Administration in project management from Amberton University and a bachelor's degree in psychology from Fairfield University. Contact her at linkedin.com/in/heidiblade.



WHY THEY STAY: UNLOCKING EMPLOYEE LOYALTY IN PROPANE COMPANIES

Employee retention in the propane industry depends on building trust, flexibility & meaningful work into the employee experience

BY KATHLEEN QUINN VOTAW

The 2025 Gray, Gray & Gray Propane Survey ranks recruitment and retention as the No. 1 industry challenge. In an industry where the incoming employee pool is scarce and turnover is expensive, propane companies must go beyond compensation strategy to attract and retain employees. A \$2 raise will fail to keep an ignored driver, and morale posters aren't effective at lowering stress.

But retaining people isn't only about the money. It's about trust between leaders and employees, trust in the organization's purpose and trust that careers can flourish. Employees who trust their employers are significantly more likely to advocate for the company, stay loyal and engage in their roles.

The 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer shows 25% of employees distrust management. Distrust stops drivers from reporting leaks, leading to increased safety incidents and negative impact on your brand. Why do we track margins to the decimal, yet only track trust with anecdotes?

The fix is not a new asset. It is the agreement that keeps a driver in the seat. Applying strategies to boost employee retention demands a shift in both mindset and policy.

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE DETERMINES PROFIT

Drivers worried about leaks cannot sell safety. Dispatchers navigating internal chaos cannot sell reliability. Stress is contagious. If a customer service representative fears her manager, her voice tightens. The customer hears indifference, not company policy.

Employee retention is fundamentally tied to the concept of employee experience — the holistic journey an employee has with their organization, starting from recruitment through their exit. Companies with a strong employee experience strategy see higher engagement and retention, while those without it struggle to keep their people. Retention isn't just about the job itself; it's about how the job fits into someone's life, ambitions and sense of purpose.

Broader workforce research reveals that highly engaged employees are far more likely to stay. In the propane industry, where many roles require unique technical skills, customer interactions and seasonal demands, cultivating an employee experience that reinforces belonging, growth and trust can counteract turnover risk. A positive employee experience doesn't happen by default; it must be designed.

Trust reduces safety incidents and churn and ultimately increases profitability. Here are the top five elements that make or break trust in the workplace and how to design an employee experience that supports company goals.

1. LACK OF TRUST IN COMPANY STABILITY

Major aggregators are acquiring independent propane retailers. This consolidation triggers Maslow's safety tier: fear of job loss. Employees in survival mode prioritize resume updates over route efficiency. Uncertainty is one of the reasons top employees quit, driven by a lack of information about the company's financial health.

Edelman data ranks "my employer" as the most trusted institution. Silence breaks that trust.

The Fix:

Transparency goes a long way. If the gallon volume drops 10%, state the number and the recovery plan. Specific bad news prevents vague panic.

2. PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Employees resign when rigid schedules break under the pressure of life. An employee's priorities often shift through the course of their career.

- *Early career:* Maximizes overtime and cash
- *Midcareer:* Demands stability and 5 p.m. hard stops
- *Late career:* Seeks reduced physical load and consulting

Assigning early career hours to late career staff forces resignations.

The Fix:

- *Part-time tracks:* Retain skills through semiretirement options.
- *Crisis policy:* Define emergency leave. Support during trauma prevents turnover.

3. FLEXIBILITY

"We can't offer remote work; we deliver gas."

This excuse confuses location with autonomy. Physics dictates where the truck goes. Management dictates when. Forcing a driver to sit in a cab for 12 hours to complete six hours of work destroys morale. It spikes cortisol. High stress causes drivers to skip safety checks

and snap at dispatchers. Feeling trusted to manage responsibilities independently matters.

The Fix:

Stop paying for the clock. Pay for gallons delivered safely.

- *The 4-10 split:* Schedule four 10-hour days. Employees gain a three-day weekend every week.
- *Banked hours:* Convert January overtime into July paid time off.
- *Outcome-based shifts:* If a driver finishes a 10-hour route in eight hours, they go home with full pay. Do not punish efficiency with broom-pushing.
- *The school run:* Allow 9 a.m. starts to accommodate parenting.

4. COMPENSATION

Market rates outpace annual reviews. Fair pay prevents dissatisfaction; it does not buy passion.

Drivers measure risk against reward. A top-rate UPS driver earns about \$44 an hour moving cardboard. Your driver earns \$22 an hour hauling explosive gas on icy roads. They see the disparity and leave.

Gray, Gray & Gray's 2025 data shows 54% of dealers raised wages to retain staff. Freezing wages is an inflation-adjusted pay cut. Additionally, employees share salary data. Paying new hires more than veterans destroys trust immediately.

The Fix:

Invest regularly in market compensation benchmarking to understand the talent market. Often, putting more of your dollars into your seasoned staff allows you to put less into recruitment efforts.

5. MEANINGFUL WORK

Propane runs dialysis machines during blackouts. It prevents pipes from bursting in winter. Connecting these outcomes to daily work creates meaning. Meaningful work improves retention more effectively than small raises. Drivers who feel like couriers quit; drivers who feel like first responders stay.

The Fix:

Connect the dots. Help employees understand the impact of their work.

- *Wrong*: “Hit 30 stops today.”
- *Right*: “Mrs. Higgins is at 10%. If you miss this stop, she freezes.”

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

There is an easily executable action item to start increasing trust and improving experience today: Conduct trust talks. Exit interviews happen too late; initiate meaningful conversations with your employees before they’ve decided to leave for better odds at influencing the outcome.

1. What frustrates you daily?
2. What would make you leave?
3. How can I help?

The key is to respond promptly. Will you be able to act immediately to resolve every complaint you receive?

Probably not. But you can be honest and transparent about what you can do and when to expect it done.

THE EMPTY DRIVER SEAT

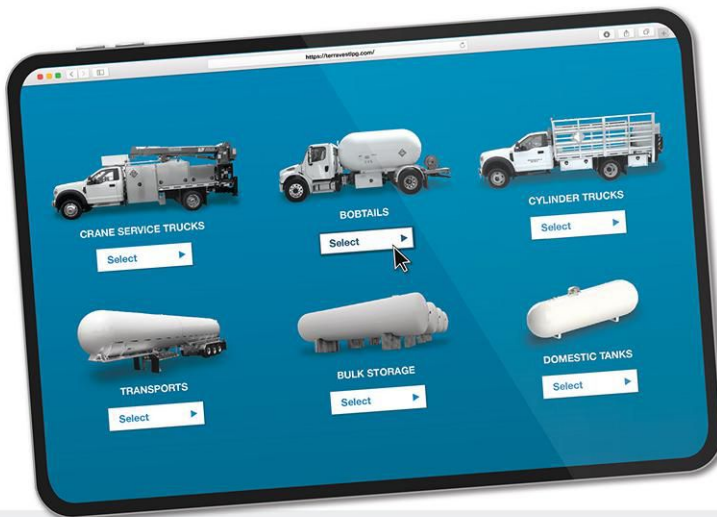
A 2024 Peterbilt bobtail sits idle, fueled and routed for 3,000 gallons. The driver knew the length of the Johnson farm hose and the school gate code. He didn’t quit because of the truck; he quit because you broke the unwritten deal. The payroll cleared, but the trust didn’t.

By intentionally addressing these retention drivers, propane companies can create a culture where employees feel trusted, appreciated and motivated. When people experience alignment between their work, growth opportunities and organizational values, they’re not just satisfied — they’re committed.

An empty bobtail costs more than unbilled gallons. It creates missed deliveries, dispatcher overtime and

driver burnout. Pay raises cannot replace predictable schedules or maintained trucks. Ask your top driver what makes their job hard and do what you can to fix the issue. Devalue their voice, and the market will correct the mistake. ▀

Kathleen Quinn Votaw is a widely published author and highly regarded speaker on recruitment, retention, culture, leadership and what it takes to thrive when the ground keeps shifting. Her Designed to Care framework serves as a step-by-step guide for leaders to finally achieve the high-performance teams they desire. The award-winning founder and CEO of TalentTrust, Votaw is a valuable strategic partner to companies throughout the United States. Visit talenttrust.com.



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TRUCKS ARE FOR GIRLS: FUELING THE FUTURE

Suburban Propane partners with a purpose

BY ROGER ROSENBAUM



Images courtesy of Suburban Propane

Monserrat Haney couldn't keep her eyes off the shiny propane delivery bobtail parked outside Suburban Propane's corporate headquarters last October. Once the Girl Scout climbed inside the cab, she also couldn't keep her hands off the truck's air horn.

"It was great," the 6-year-old happily told BPN.

For the next two hours, the horn became something of an unofficial soundtrack as 53 Girl Scouts — ages 5 to 18 — rotated through an innovative career-exploration program designed to introduce them not only to trucking, but also to the operations, marketing, finance, legal and leadership roles essential to one of the nation's largest propane marketers.

Kelly Hennefeld, Suburban Propane's director of compensation and talent management, recalled that the girls were so eager to try the horn that it went off about "500 times."

"Good thing we don't have any neighbors close to us," joked Hennefeld, a former member of the Brownie Girl Scout Troop.

The event — Trucks Are for Girls: Fueling the Future — was built as a partnership between Suburban Propane, the Girl Scouts of Northern New Jersey and the Women in Trucking Association. The nontraditional partnership sought solutions to a traditional problem that industries have been facing for years. Innovation and growth are often stalled by persistent talent shortages, an aging workforce and a lingering perception problem about who belongs behind the wheel.

"Trucking in general has typically been a male-populated industry," said Jenny Fall, Women in Trucking Association's

director of driver engagement. Women currently make up nearly 9.5% of professional drivers in the United States, according to the Women in Trucking Association's 2024-25 WIT Index. That figure has become a headline statistic in an industry trying to widen the pipeline. The idea is not just to fill seats, but to expand opportunity and modernize how young people see work.

Suburban Propane has partnered with Women in Trucking for nearly 20 years in a push to broaden the appeal of transportation roles.

DESIGNING A 'FEMALE-FRIENDLY' WORKPLACE

Suburban Propane — serving 1 million customers in 42 states — was named a top company for women employment in transportation by Women in Trucking. In 2024, the propane marketer said women make up nearly one-third of its overall workforce — approximately 1,180 women across its national footprint.

"We are honored to be included in the Women in Trucking's list of the top companies for women to work in transportation," said Nandini Sankara, a Suburban Propane spokesperson.

This recognition reflects what Women in Trucking has emphasized in its research: Companies that want to recruit and retain more women need to address practical issues — from culture and advancement to scheduling and safety — not just recruitment messaging.

That message hit home in the Suburban Propane/Girl Scouts of Northern New Jersey collaboration. Sandra Kenoff, president

and CEO of Girl Scouts of Northern New Jersey, explained, “Programs like this work because girls can see a path.”

“It’s that concept of ‘if you see it, you can be it,’” Kenoff continued. “Young women don’t necessarily consider this type of career.”

During a recent episode of ONNJ’s Mornings with Ken Rosato, Suburban Propane president and CEO Michael Stivala explained that inviting the Girl Scouts into the corporate headquarters was not intended to sell a particular job. Stivala told the veteran New York City news anchor turned web-based news reporter that the goal was to show the sheer variety of roles that keep the national energy company running. Stivala wanted to let young people imagine themselves inside the evolving world of energy, serving home, commercial and agricultural customers.

“My team had a great time with it ... it was great for me to welcome so many people into the building,” said Stivala, who has been Suburban’s president and CEO since 2014.

New recruitment strategies are likely to lead to competitive advantages in the marketplace and the community.

“Suburban Propane is committed to building and maintaining an inclusive workforce in all aspects of its operations and supporting career development throughout the organization,” added Sankara.

Company leaders realize the most effective way to shift public perceptions is to start sooner than the typical job fair — before stereotypes harden and while curiosity still leads. This progressive and out-of-the-box thinking becomes a “win” for all involved.

FAR FROM CHILD’S PLAY

On Oct. 15, 2025, this new recruitment model began at the company’s corporate headquarters in northern New Jersey. A two-hour, after-school experiential event was designed to move beyond photo ops, ribbon cuttings and congratulatory news releases. The goal was a highly curated, behind-the-scenes interaction with a modern workplace.

The event included Women in Trucking’s WITney Educational Trailer, an immersive experience that included a realistic driving simulator and short sessions about personal branding, as well as insight into other professional careers within Suburban Propane. The schedule allowed for plenty of time to ask questions.

The day was preceded by “months and months and months of planning,” Hennefeld recalled.

In the end, she estimated the planning took months to build a schedule of “rotations” that could keep a wide range of ages — from kindergarteners to high school students — engaged.

Members of the Girl Scouts of Northern New Jersey — the 11th-largest Girl Scout Council in the country — also learned about logistics, the environmental benefits of propane and renewable energy, and the logistics of running a company like Suburban. The girls had a schedule and participated in each session in the rotation.

The girls made personal connections with real people behind the jobs. As an added bonus, they saw Stivala step out from behind his desk and actively participate in the program throughout the building.

During his introductory remarks, Stivala made the comparison between the organizations, explaining that both

the Girl Scout organization and Suburban Propane have been serving customers and communities for a century. In both cases, he explained that seeking growth in new ways is a recipe for avoiding stagnation.

WITNEY INTERACTIVE TRAILER

Spending time inside the WITney trailer was also a big hit. The girls took computer-based quizzes and explored different parts of trucking and transportation careers.

“Women in Trucking brought this huge simulator ... that gave the girls the opportunity to get behind the wheel of a tractor trailer and feel what it was like ... to have that much power and weight behind you,” Stivala explained.

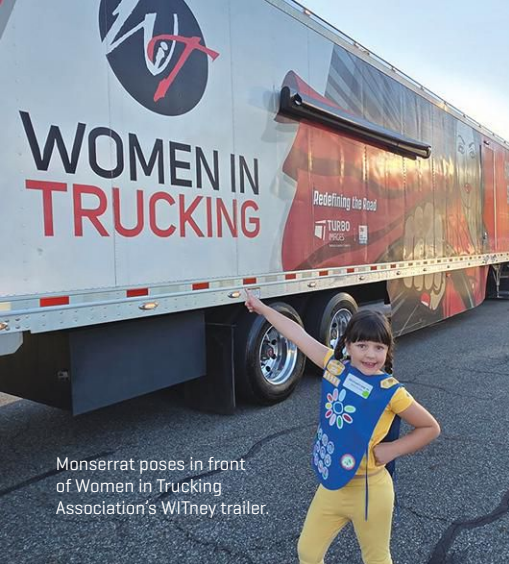
To capture the excitement of the



The Girl Scouts tried out a driving simulator in the WITney trailer.



Stivala (right) looks on as the girls learn about propane bobtails.



Monserat poses in front of Women in Trucking Association's WIThey trailer.

moment, parents and employees snapped photos and selfies that quickly got posted to social media platforms.

A WORKFORCE PIPELINE

In his interview with newscaster Rosato, Stivala described watching the faces at the event as priceless. The interview touched on the idea that college attendance need not be the

single definition of success. Instead, conversations about careers at home and in high schools should also involve descriptions of trades, logistics and hands-on jobs that provide a living without crushing college debt.

Women in Trucking's Jenny Fall described programs like Suburban's invitation to the Girl Scouts as a way to see trucking with a much wider lens. "They see dad or grandpa on the route, and they don't necessarily see us."

WIT's approach is to increase points of contact — in schools and at public events — so trucking becomes visible as a modern career that can connect to technology, mechanics and problem-solving.

"It's really a way for us to create that awareness," Fall said.

WHY GIRL SCOUTS GOT ON BOARD

Girl Scouts' Kenoff seeks to shift both the skills and the mindset of her

members and public perception of her organization. She told BPN that her organization is preparing girls for a changing economy — not just through badges and campfires, but through positive exposure to real workplaces.

As Girl Scouts broadens its programming beyond the most familiar images of the organization, Kenoff said the mission remains the same: building confidence.

"We're known very well for cookies, crafts and camp, and we want to make sure that we're known for other aspects of our mission, which are to build girls of courage, confidence and character who make the world a better place."

Kenoff said the opportunity to attend workshops with Women in Trucking and Suburban Propane offers "a nontraditional opportunity for girls in short, varied sessions with tactile learning that aligns well with how kids learn best."



Make Safety a Habit, Every Day.

A strong safety culture isn't built in a day — it's built through consistent, everyday habits in every interaction.

The *Every Day Safe* program from the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) helps propane companies strengthen safety culture through a simple, adaptable framework and practical tools that support safer policies, procedures, and daily habits. When safety becomes a habit, it helps protect employees, customers, and communities — and strengthens the propane industry as a whole.

► Visit propane.com/EveryDaySafe to enroll and begin building your company's safety legacy.

 Propane Education & Research Council



Stivala described the event as a way to blend the company's work with an iconic organization that girls already understand. "The Girl Scouts may be famous for their cookies, but they're really about building confident, capable leaders," he said. "Our goal was to make the day engaging and to demonstrate how imagination and purpose come together in the work we do."

WHAT THE GIRLS SAW; WHAT THE PARENTS FELT

Montserrat's mother, Evangeline Gomez Haney, said that both she and her daughter walked into the building not really knowing what Suburban Propane was — or why a fuel company headquarters would be the setting for a Girl Scout event.

Propane by itself may not be an appealing topic to those 5- to 18-year-olds. They may understand that homes and businesses use propane for heating,

cooking and cleaning, but it becomes a different story when the fuel is presented as part of an environmentally friendly solution. Then, renewable energy becomes a hot topic with the Girl Scouts.

The corporate headquarters quickly turned into an indoor-outdoor classroom session — not just about propane, but about the range of jobs inside a company that delivers energy across the country. For example, Suburban's Hennefeld explained she came to the energy industry from investment banking — of course starting first as a Girl Scout Brownie.

Outside the WIT trailer, Montserrat's mother spoke with a female driver. "That was really impressive for me as a mother because, again, it was like meeting a 'unicorn.' I've never met a woman who's been in this type of field before in my entire life."

The most powerful moments for parents came with the realization that

being a truck driver was less like a stereotype and more like a person with a real story. JoLynn Kelly, Women in Trucking's volunteer driver, told the girls that trucking provided a living for her family and that she had traveled through 48 different states.

"I spoke to the driver ... and she had the best time," Fall said. "They had so many good questions for her."

WHO IS SAFER BEHIND THE WHEEL?

Women in Trucking Association's own research reveals that women are actually safer drivers. Other sources also find that female truck drivers are 14% less likely to be involved in accidents when compared to male counterparts.

This "enhances safety and reduces costs associated with accidents and insurance," according to an article posted on aaafreight.com. Business Insider reported in 2018 that women were also less likely to quit their jobs.

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SUBURBANCARES LEADS THE WAY

The afternoon of innovative learning was made possible by SuburbanCares, a corporate umbrella program that “focuses on community service, charity partnerships and supporting local organizations.”

“It involves employee volunteerism for food drives, disaster relief with the American Red Cross and veteran support, aiming to strengthen community connections and foster a positive corporate culture,” according to Suburban’s website.

A KEY QUESTION

Could putting a six-year-old at the controls of a WIT driving simulator help the industry reach those goals? That’s the vision: that all event participants could help drive business, innovation and individual careers. Thanks to this partnership, long-term workforce

development and filling the void of drivers is clearly a two-way street.

For a moment, though, Montserrat Haney hit a speed bump. As a first grader, her feet could barely reach the control pedals. “I had to stretch it,” she said.

The event’s defining moment for Suburban’s Hennefeld came when she paused amid the logistics of the event and noticed the emotional impact in real time.

“I just stopped for a minute, standing outside. A little girl looked me dead in the eye and said, ‘This is the best day of my life.’”

ALL ROADS LEAD BACK TO COOKIES

It did not take long for the conversation with Monserrat to turn back to cookies. Her favorite cookie is the S’more.

When asked if her daughter had her sights set on selling cookies to Suburban Propane employees, her mom laughed. “She sells everyone cookies.”

“Well, if you give her the time of day,” she proudly proclaimed.

BPN confirmed that Hennefeld and Stivala share Samoas as their favorite Girl Scout cookies.

The career stories for the 53 Girl Scouts who visited Suburban Propane are far from written. One day, Monserrat Haney may pull up at Suburban Propane headquarters with a tractor trailer loaded full of cookies.

If she does, she will most certainly hit the air horn as a tribute to the road that got her there. ■

Roger Rosenbaum, president of Brand-News-Team, is a senior communication, marketing and public relations executive. His company guides propane marketers in strengthening customer engagement and brand positioning. He can be reached at roger@brand-news-team.com.



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MEET WOMEN IN ENERGY'S 2025 WOMAN OF THE YEAR

Pam Giordano reflects on the ingredients involved in crafting a successful career in the energy sector

BY JOHNNY NICKEL



Women in Energy was founded in 2018, and since that time, the organization has taken strategic steps to create opportunities to boost mentorship and growth opportunities in the oil and energy industry.

As part of this goal, Women in Energy features one woman each year as the recipient of its “Woman of the Year” award. Women in Energy named Pam Giordano, director at Cetane Associates, as its 2025 award honoree. BPN reached out to Giordano to learn more about her role in the energy industry and her perspective on the growing opportunities for women in propane.

Congratulations on winning the Woman of the Year award from Women in Energy. Can you describe your journey in the energy industry and your current involvement in this sector?

Giordano: I began my career as an accounts payable clerk for a heating company in New Hampshire. I will not tell you how many years ago! I did that for a period and then took a few years off to stay home with my children. I returned to the industry as a part-time customer service representative, and became office manager and later director of operations of a company in New Hampshire. I went on to run a heating company in Maine for a few years before joining Cetane Associates as director in 2023. I am currently a director with Cetane, a mergers and acquisitions firm focused on the home services industry. I also serve as vice president of Women in Energy.

What achievement are you most proud of in your career?

I have been honored several times throughout my career. I was the first female chairperson of the Oil Heat Council of New Hampshire (now the Energy Marketers of New Hampshire). I was named Marketer of the Year by them as well. I was also named a NEFI Legend and most recently honored as Woman of the Year by Women in Energy. Recognition by my peers is nothing short of amazing, and while those awards mean a great deal to me, what matters most goes beyond trophies and plaques. The relationships I have built within the industry have been the most meaningful to me. To get a call from other women in the industry asking for career advice, or when former employees call to check in, that means I have made an impact, and it is a great feeling. I have a stack of cards from former employees and coworkers filled with such kind words that mean the world to me. I even had a former driver ask me to officiate his wedding. His fiancée later said that was the only thing he asked for when planning the wedding. How can you top that?

Describe what Women in Energy means to you and the role it plays in the energy sector.

First, I want to say that it is not just open to women. Men are more than welcome and are encouraged to not just join, but to participate. And we have several who do just that. There is no ‘man-bashing.’ I cannot say enough good things about Women in Energy. It is a wonderful opportunity for women to connect

with others in the industry. We have an amazing conference every year in the fall. The energy generated is fantastic and unique from other conferences. Whether attendees go to network, teach, learn or all three, everyone attending truly wants to be there. The networking, friendship-building and camaraderie is inspiring.

What would you say are the biggest obstacles facing women working in energy today?

Women are still facing an uphill battle in certain sectors of this industry. While times are changing, it is still a male-dominated business. I recently saw a picture on LinkedIn of a company in the industry — nine men and one woman. So off balance. I have also talked to women who were asked to cover a higher-level position, while still doing their own job. That position was later filled by a male. Why are women good enough to fill in, but not get the job or even be asked to

apply? Others have told me this is not an industry they would suggest women get into. Unfortunately, those are things that I still hear about. But it has improved over the years. As more and more intelligent, energetic, capable women enter the industry, it will continue to improve. There are so many amazing daughters running their parents' companies and doing an incredible job. The industry has a great future as the number of women in it continues to grow.

What kind of support has made the most difference in your own career?

In my early days as a manager at a heating company, there were no more than a handful of women attending meetings of the Oil Heat Council of New Hampshire. With the exception of a few, I was accepted as an equal. I was fortunate to have an amazing mentor who took me under his wing, as well as others

who were always just a phone call away, always willing to share insights. It was an exceptional group of people to work with. I've had, and continue to have, extraordinary bosses and coworkers who have taught me so much. I'm never afraid to pick up the phone and ask for help or admit to not knowing something. They always have my back. I also have been blessed with a sensational group of friends I have made in the industry over the years, and they are always there for me when I need them. They have all helped in my career development.

Have there been any changes in the energy sector that have stood out to you regarding opportunities available to women?

Over time, there has been a shift in education for women. While I was of the cooking and sewing education generation, a few years ago, schools began to push for girls to get more

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involved in math and science. And women have consistently proven their capability in every field and occupation. Training and education are not limited to men only, and as acceptance of women in these careers continues to grow, opportunities will continue to open.

What advice would you give a woman just starting a career in the energy sector?

The best piece of advice I can give a woman starting out in this industry is to join a group like Women in Energy or Women in Propane. These groups are excellent places to network. The women who are members bring a wealth of knowledge and are happy to share it. They also provide a terrific support system. These organizations offer webinars, conferences and networking events. I would also tell them that some days are hard. Depending on which area of the energy sector they work in, the

days can be long. Most companies in this industry are still male dominated, but there are plenty of women who are happy to be a resource. Reach out! You are not alone; you are among friends.

How do you expect workplace dynamics to shift as more women enter energy workforces?

As the next generation of women and men enter this industry, the dynamics will continue to shift. Women are continuing to prove how valuable they are to a company, in all aspects: owner, manager, driver, service technician. And the younger generation of men have been raised by working mothers, so I think that will help. They are used to seeing women work and the 'traditionally male industry' will soon be a thing of the past.

How does Women in Energy engage with other energy associations?

Propane is a newer part of my career,



and while I'm not directly involved with Women in Propane, I know there are women in the industry who are actively involved in both organizations. Women in Energy is currently in strategic planning discussions, and engaging with other organizations has been a focus of



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the conversation — so stay tuned.

10. What actionable strategies can energy providers use to make their workplaces more inclusive of female employees?

A few suggestions that I have for managers:

- Have more of your staff join a group like Women in Energy, and not just the women. Male owners, managers and staff should participate. Come to the conference, listen, ask questions. You may learn a few things.
- Talk to your female staff. Ask them how they feel, what they want or need, etc.
- Take a really good look at yourself, as well as at your company. How are the women treated within your organization?
- Are you walking or just talking? Follow through! Reach out for help and suggestions.

11. What area of the energy sector are you most focused on right now?

I wouldn't say that I am focused on a specific sector of the energy industry. Instead, there are a few things that I like to focus on in broader terms. At Cetane, while we have a beautiful office in Houston, about 75% of the team works remotely across multiple states and time zones. I make a point to check in with everyone on a regular basis. While a Teams call is not the same as being there in person, you can see someone's face and have a check-in call. I have been called the mother of the group, which I take as a compliment. That sense of connection is a positive, not only for me but for the entire team. I like to check in with several of the women in energy as well. I also enjoy that I have been able to help out with a few charitable endeavors. Cetane has been a big supporter of the Safe House Project. We

created educational videos to help people in the energy industry, as well as other industries, recognize the signs of human trafficking and understand how to report it. It has been heartwarming to see how the industry has jumped on it and trained their staff. It is making a real impact — we are truly saving lives. How amazing is that! I have also been involved in several charitable activities through Women in Energy. We have donated work clothes to Dress for Success in Rhode Island, household items to support transitional housing, toys for Toys for Tots in New Hampshire, and several hundred feminine hygiene kits to HomeFront New Jersey. Those endeavors have been a major focus for me. 🍷

Johnny Nickel is managing editor for Butane-Propane News.



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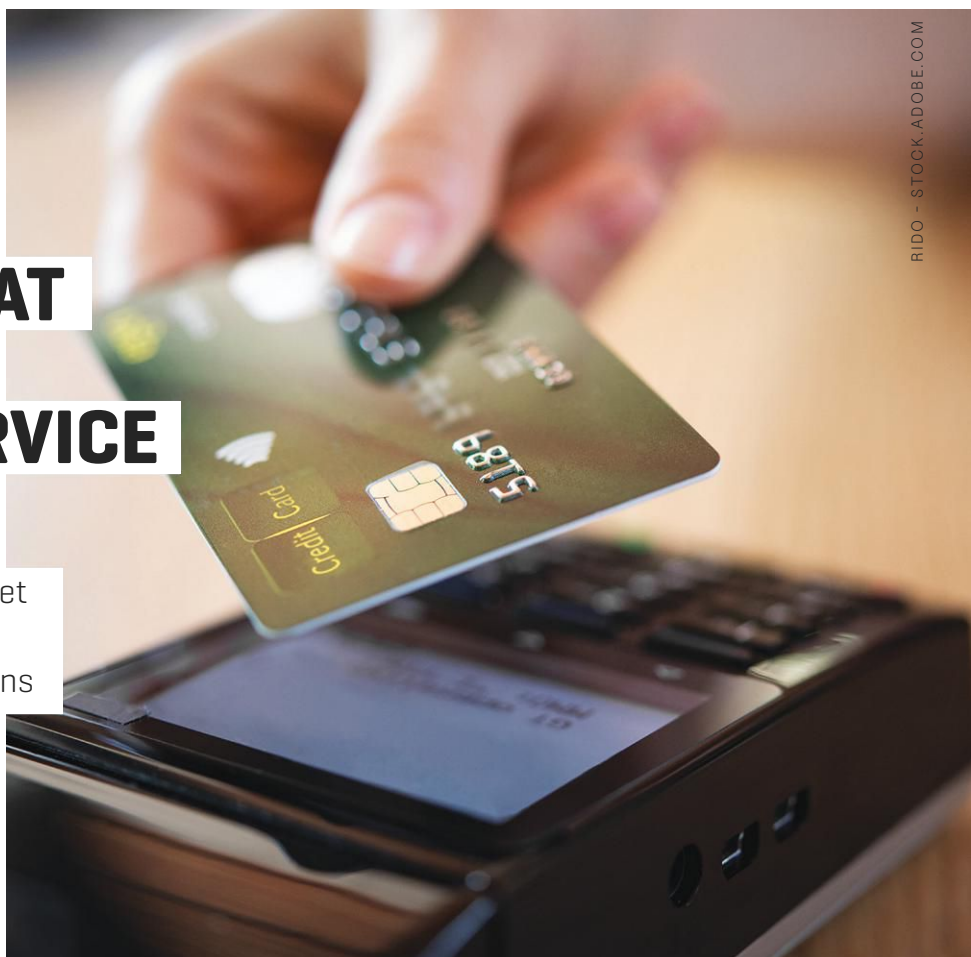
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BUILDING A PAYMENT PROCESSING STRATEGY THAT WORKS FOR PROPANE SERVICE COMPANIES

Your payment system must meet the technological requirements of shifting customer expectations

BY MATTHEW TASKER



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Payment processing rarely gets the attention it deserves — until something breaks. A frustrated client whose card was declined during a cold snap. Rising fees that quietly erode margins. Double data entry caused by systems that don't talk to each other. For propane service companies, payments are not a back-office detail. They are a core operational system that touches cash flow, customer satisfaction and staff workload every day.

If your payment setup evolved piece by piece over the years, you are not alone. Many propane companies added tools reactively, not strategically. The result is often higher costs, manual work and missed opportunities to serve customers better. A thoughtful approach to payment processing can reverse that trend. This guide covers key payment

system decisions for propane operations. You can apply these insights whether you're starting from scratch or modifying existing practices so you can make decisions that stick.

CUSTOMER PAYMENT EXPECTATIONS HAVE SHIFTED PERMANENTLY

Residential propane customers already compare their billing experience to utilities, streaming services and banks. They expect to pay online, enroll in automatic payments and receive clear confirmation when a payment posts.

Research consistently shows that most customers now prefer digital billing and recurring payments.

That preference shows up operationally. Companies offering simple online payment options see fewer late

payments and fewer calls asking basic billing questions.

Start with a simple question: How easy is it for your customers to pay you today? If the answer involves mailing checks, waiting on hold or calling during business hours to update an expired credit card, you are creating friction that no longer needs to exist.

A modern payment strategy begins with flexibility:

- Online portals
- Simple recurring payments
- Automatic updating of expiration dates and reissued cards
- In-person options when needed

The easier you make your payment process, the more predictable your cash flow becomes.

MANAGING PROCESSING FEES IS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Credit and debit cards remain central to propane billing. Customers expect them, and smooth automatic payments often rely on them. But card fees can quietly become one of your largest controllable expenses.

What many propane operators overlook is that propane qualifies as an essential service. Card networks recognize this through utility and emerging market programs that offer lower interchange rates when accounts are properly classified. Interchange is the base fee set by card brands and issuing banks, and it often makes up the largest portion of processing costs.

When a propane merchant account is correctly configured, transactions may qualify for lower rates than standard retail categories. The impact can be significant. Even a 1% reduction in fees translates directly into retained margin on every gallon sold.

The important point is this: These programs are not automatic. Classification matters and it should be reviewed periodically with your provider as volumes, customer mix and payment channels change.

ACH PAYMENTS ADD STABILITY & REDUCE PROCESSING COSTS

Automated Clearing House (ACH) payments move funds directly between bank accounts. They are often called e-checks or bank drafts. For propane companies, ACH offers a practical balance between customer convenience and cost control.

ACH fees are typically lower than credit card fees. Commercial accounts often prefer them, and residential customers on budget or automatic billing plans frequently adopt them once the option is clearly explained.

Offering ACH does not mean replacing cards. It means giving customers choice. When customers understand that

ACH lowers the risk of payment interruptions, many are willing to switch for recurring payments.

To work well, ACH must be integrated into your billing workflow. Manual ACH processing introduces delays and reconciliation issues. Integrated credit card and ACH payment gateway software automatically posts payments when settled and maintains accurate transaction statuses without unnecessary staff intervention.

AUTOMATIC PAYMENTS REDUCE OPERATIONAL RISK, NOT JUST EFFORT

Automatic payments are often positioned as a convenience feature. They are that, but they also reduce operational risk.

When payments align automatically with deliveries or invoices, late payments drop and service disruptions become less common. Staff spend less time making reminder calls and more time supporting customers and operations.

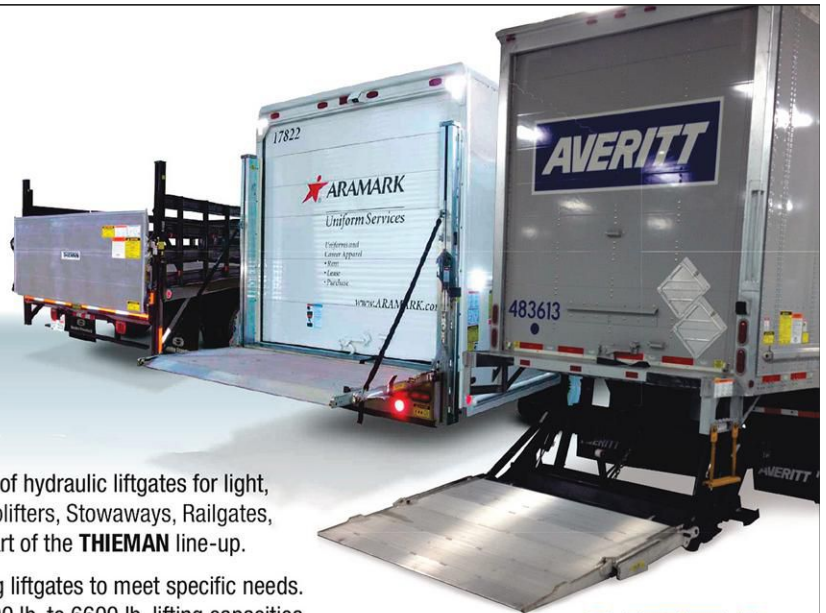


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During peak winter demand, this matters even more. Fewer payment issues mean fewer distractions when teams need to focus on safety, routing and delivery execution. The most effective automatic payment programs are paired with clear communication. Customers know when payments will run, how they are calculated and how to update information when needed.

HOW ACCOUNT UPDATER SERVICES PREVENT AVOIDABLE PAYMENT FAILURES

Expired or replaced cards are one of the most common reasons automatic payments fail. They are also one of the easiest problems to prevent.

Card networks offer account updater services that automatically refresh stored card numbers and expiration dates when banks issue replacements. When enabled, these services update payment credentials behind the scenes without

customer involvement.

For propane companies, account updaters are essential. They prevent declined payments that lead to late notices, service calls and manual follow-up. They also protect customer relationships by avoiding unnecessary interruptions.

Many businesses assume this feature is enabled by default. It is not. Confirming that your processor supports and actively uses account updater services is a small step with a meaningful payoff.

SYSTEM INTEGRATION KEEPS PAYMENTS FROM BECOMING A MANUAL BOTTLENECK

Payments touch nearly every internal system. When these systems do not communicate, staff fill the gaps manually. This includes:

- Billing and accounting
- Customer records
- Delivery platforms

Manual entry increases errors and delays. Payments post late. Deposits require extra reconciliation. Customer service teams struggle to answer basic balance questions confidently.

Integration also enables better customer self-service. Online portals show accurate balances. Receipts generate automatically. Payment status updates without staff involvement. The result is less internal effort and a smoother customer experience.

PAYMENT SECURITY & COMPLIANCE ARE CORE OPERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Payment processing carries responsibility beyond convenience and cost. Propane companies must also protect customer data and comply with payment security standards. The most widely used standard is the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard, often called PCI. It governs how card data is stored,

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transmitted and protected. Even when using third-party processors, merchants retain responsibility for maintaining compliant practices.

Secure systems reduce risk. Tokenization replaces card numbers with encrypted references. Access controls limit who can view payment data. Regular system updates close vulnerabilities before they are exploited.

Choosing payment tools that handle security at the infrastructure level reduces the burden on your team. It also protects your business from costly breaches, fines and reputational damage.

CHOOSE PARTNERS WHO UNDERSTAND BOTH PAYMENTS & TECHNOLOGY

Payment processing is not just financial. It is technical. Software updates, security standards, system integrations and regulatory changes all affect how payments function day to day.

Providers with both payments and technical expertise are better equipped to support propane operations. They understand how billing systems interact with gateways, how updates affect workflows and how to resolve issues before they disrupt operations.

This matters during implementation and over time. New payment methods, compliance updates and system changes are inevitable. Having informed guidance helps you adapt without rebuilding your entire process.

INTENTIONAL DESIGN DELIVERS QUIET, LASTING RETURNS

A well-designed payment system does more than move money. It reduces friction. It lowers costs. It stabilizes cash flow. It frees staff to focus on delivery, safety and customer relationships.

Propane companies already manage enough complexity from weather, logistics and regulation. Payments

should simplify operations, not add to the burden.

Treating payment processing as a strategic system rather than a commodity is one of the most practical improvements a propane service company can make. The benefits appear quietly, month after month, in smoother operations and stronger margins. ▀

Matthew Tasker has over 22 years in payment processing, specializing in uncovering hidden fees and implementing cost-saving strategies for businesses. He combines his deep industry expertise with real-world solutions, helping companies navigate complex payment landscapes. Tasker can be reached at 207-780-2600 or by email at cchelp@northeastfuelpay.com. Learn about Northeast Fuel Pay at northeastfuelpay.com.



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EFFICIENCY IS SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability in propane operations is built through everyday decisions that improve efficiency, reliability & long-term resilience

BY CHRISTIAN LEVAC



Rail terminal in Prescott, Ontario, Canada
(Image courtesy of Propane Levac)

In the propane industry, sustainability is often misunderstood as a trend or a marketing initiative. In reality, sustainability has become an operational imperative.

Over the past several years, the industry has experienced a significant shift toward efficiency, driven largely by rapid and widespread technological advancement. Companies that embrace these changes are not simply adapting; they are positioning themselves to thrive.

Sustainability is not about following trends. It is about resilience. It requires a willingness to continuously improve, evolve operations and remain flexible as new tools and expectations emerge.

That constant movement can be challenging, but it also brings new perspective and pushes organizations to find better, smarter ways to operate while keeping customer service at the center of the business.

In many ways, sustainability in propane operations is like a rolling train. The train must keep moving forward, but the tracks must constantly be aligned to ensure it can travel at top speed safely and smoothly while still delivering a great experience for the passengers. Every adjustment, whether large or small, contributes to long-term success.

SUSTAINABILITY IN EVERYDAY OPERATIONS

In today's propane industry, sustainability often shows up in day-to-day operational decisions rather than high-profile initiatives. Dispatch, route optimization and delivery scheduling are some of the clearest examples.

Optimized routing allows trucks to operate more efficiently and serve more customers in less time. Less distance driven means lower fuel consumption, reduced wear on vehicles and less

fatigue for drivers. Well-planned routes also make it possible to complete more deliveries in a day, improving productivity while maintaining safety.

When drivers spend less time on the road and reach more customers with greater consistency, everyone benefits — the company, the employee and the customer.

These improvements may seem gradual, but over time they generate meaningful gains in efficiency, cost control and service quality.

THE IMPACT OF TANK MONITORING & TELEMETRY

One of the most significant operational shifts in recent years has been the adoption of telemetry and tank monitoring systems.

These technologies provide real-time visibility into tank levels and consumption patterns, fundamentally

changing how companies plan and execute deliveries. With accurate data, propane companies can prepare routes more effectively, anticipate customer demand and reduce emergency or unscheduled deliveries.

This improves operational efficiency and reduces stress across the company, from dispatchers to drivers to customer service teams.

Tank monitoring also provides substantial value to customers. It relieves the responsibility of monitoring fuel levels and making phone calls, offering peace of mind and confidence that their supply is being managed proactively. Fewer phone calls, fewer runouts and more reliable service contribute directly to improved customer satisfaction.

From an operational standpoint, real-time data allows companies to plan ahead, account for weather conditions and forecast demand more accurately. Better planning leads to better scheduling, supporting sustainability through reduced fuel use, optimized labor and improved asset use.

ASSET MANAGEMENT & RECERTIFICATION

Sustainability is also reflected in how companies manage physical assets. Cylinder and tank recertification programs are a strong example. When tanks reach the end of their initial certification period, recertification allows them to remain in service for an additional 10 to 25 years.

Investing in proper recertification infrastructure and reuse practices reduces waste, lowers capital expenditures and protects valuable assets. These efforts also support safety and compliance while helping reduce liability associated with aging or improperly maintained equipment.

Extending the life of existing assets through maintenance and recertification highlights an important aspect of sustainability: protecting what already exists. This approach is both environmentally responsible and financially sound.

Extending the life of existing assets through maintenance & recertification highlights an important aspect of sustainability: protecting what already exists.

INFRASTRUCTURE & RELIABILITY

Reliable infrastructure is another critical element of operational sustainability. To protect supply and maintain service continuity, many propane companies are investing in backup power systems at bulk plants and rail facilities. These investments help prevent product loss and ensure operations can continue during power outages, severe weather events or other disruptions.

In an industry where reliability is essential, these measures strengthen customer trust and long-term resilience. Downtime is costly not only in lost revenue, but also in reputational impact. Proactive infrastructure investments help keep operations running and reduce losses of time and money.

RENEWABLE PROPANE & THE FUTURE

No discussion of sustainability in the propane industry is complete without acknowledging the introduction of renewable propane. This innovation represents a significant opportunity for the industry to strengthen its environmental profile while maintaining the reliability and performance customers expect.

As renewable propane continues to develop and expand, it will play an important role in positioning the propane industry for the future, supporting sustainability goals while reinforcing propane's value as a clean, versatile and dependable energy solution.

SUSTAINABILITY AS A MINDSET

Ultimately, sustainability in the propane industry is not defined by a

single initiative. It is a mindset that influences everyday decisions, from major technology investments to small operational improvements.

Whether it is upgrading a dispatch system, implementing advanced scheduling software, investing in automated safety training or improving communication systems, sustainability is embedded in daily operations. Each action contributes to efficiency, safety and long-term stability.

Efficiency is sustainability. By continuously improving operations, embracing technology and prioritizing effective customer service, propane companies can build resilient businesses prepared for the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Source Note: This article is based on the author's professional experience in propane distribution and observations of operational practices across the industry. General industry knowledge is informed by publicly available resources from organizations such as the Canadian Propane Association and the Propane Education & Research Council. ■

Christian Levac is president of Propane Levac, an energy solutions provider headquartered in St. Isidore, Ontario. With over 20 years of experience in propane distribution, he is committed to innovation, operational efficiency and advancing sustainable practices that strengthen the industry's long-term resilience. Visit propanelevac.ca/en.



BUILDING SUCCESSFUL SALESPEOPLE IN THE PROPANE INDUSTRY

Propane marketers aren't only selling a fuel — they're selling a partnership

BY ED VARNEY



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The propane industry continues to offer strong long-term opportunities, but developing effective sales talent remains a challenge. New salespeople often enter the business with prior sales experience, yet struggle to adapt to an industry that is regulated, operationally complex and built on long-term customer relationships rather than transactional volume.

Success in propane sales depends as much on management structure and training discipline as it does on an individual salesperson's effort. Companies that invest early in education, operational alignment and clear expectations consistently outperform those that rely on informal, trial-and-error development.

When I started in the industry in 1990, the product offerings were standard and dated. Most of the public at that time knew very little about the impact and uses of propane. Over the years, through innovation and industry investment, a wide variety of products and services has developed. National marketing efforts by the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) have increased awareness of how beneficial propane is. The new salesperson potentially has a full package to offer to their customers.

The propane industry has matured and is a great place to build a career. To be successful, though, the new salesperson needs to understand how the industry works, know the culture of their organization, and take the initiative to learn and listen.

THE NATURE OF PROPANE SALES

Propane is not a commodity sale in the traditional sense. Customers are purchasing a managed energy solution that includes safety compliance, delivery reliability, equipment support and emergency response. Pricing matters, but service failures, safety lapses and communication breakdowns are far more likely to drive

customer attrition. It is critical to understand the customer needs and expectations.

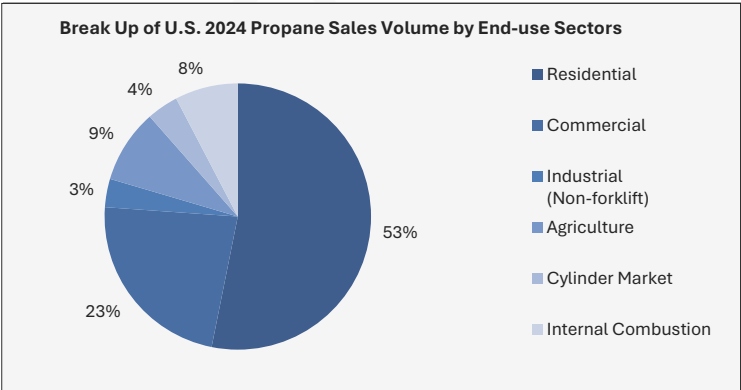
As a result, salespeople must understand how their actions affect not only the loyalty of their customers, but also their impact on volume and margin, operations, service capacity and risk exposure. A salesperson who knows how their company works will be successful. They are selling more than propane. Service, comfort and peace of mind are all elements of a successful propane company.

WHAT A NEW SALESPERSON SHOULD DO

Whenever a person starts a new job there is a period of getting familiar with the company and the role. This is the time to build a foundation to be a solid performer. The new salesperson has a responsibility to ask questions, learn as much as they can and know what is expected of them.

An overall understanding of the market segments of the industry will help focus on areas of opportunity. Some of the

Exhibit 14: Share of 2024 Total U.S. Retail Propane Sales by Sector



Source: 2024 Annual Retail Sales Final Report — PERC/Frost & Sullivan

segments are growing where others are declining. On the previous page is a chart depicting market segmentation in the United States.

The propane industry fortunately has a multitude of resources to help. Several companies have a training department with a formal process. This can be highly effective, and it is important for a company to have consistency. Companies that have employee handbooks and defined processes have less issues with personnel and customer experience.

According to the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM), “despite variations in how workers rate their organizational cultures globally, workplace culture remains critically linked to motivation. Eighty-three percent of those who rate their workplace culture as good or excellent are motivated to produce high-quality work as compared to 45% of those in poor or terrible cultures.”

Therefore, a positive culture that welcomes a new salesperson is likely to retain that salesperson longer.

In addition to company resources to learn about the industry, PERC has dramatically improved the education programs they offer. This training is essential and would be a solid first step for salespeople new to the industry. They will learn about almost everything they need through the training. It is available online through propane associations and private trainers. The key element of PERC training is that it has become the industry standard in most states. A propane salesperson must understand the full scope of what is being sold, including:

- Bulk propane vs. cylinder exchange programs
- Tank sizes, placement requirements and ownership models
- Regulators, meters and basic system components

- Delivery methods
- Pricing structures and contract options
- Leak checks, safety inspections and compliance requirements

Another part of the training of the new salesperson is to understand the technical aspects of delivery, installations and regulatory compliance. The propane codes National Fire Protection Association 54 and 58 are the basis for all regulations. A new salesperson should have a copy of each and become familiar with how to use them. This is critical when selling residential or commercial installations. A full understanding and knowledge of the main codes will add credibility to the salesperson. Customers will always ask questions. How a person answers them will determine their success in closing deals. It is also helpful when meeting with local inspectors.

Building relations in the industry is also important. Getting to know the

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authority having jurisdiction will help when there are questions on a particular installation. A positive relationship of trust and credibility will certainly help mitigate those situations effectively.

Participation in local associations will keep them informed about new products, rule changes, industry updates and much more. New salespeople should have a relationship with vendors so they understand the benefits of products and services.

More importantly, a new salesperson needs to have a positive relationship with fellow employees to gain trust and ensure an environment where everyone works together.

MANAGEMENT'S ROLE IN SALESPERSON DEVELOPMENT

The most common cause of underperformance among new propane salespeople is not lack of motivation — it is lack of structure. Management must

express clear expectations and review on a regular basis. Management should also have a profile and process to hire new salespeople.

"Precision is a prerequisite for performance," said Jeremy Sullivan, owner and vice president of Recruit XL. "Management needs to truly define what the role will entail on a day-to-day basis. Generic elements that don't relate to the job should not be in the job description. Failing to capture what an employee [salesperson] will be doing on a Tuesday afternoon is setting them up for failure."

A well-written job description should be the blueprint for the interview team. Every interviewer must be briefed on their specific discovery goals to avoid redundant or irrelevant questioning and should be prepared to answer pertinent questions, not simply wing it. Striking a balance of measuring a candidate's aptitude and cultural fit is essential to an effective hire.

A structured hiring process gives the candidate confidence that they were selected for the right reason and sets them up for success. Conversely, a disciplined process ensures the hiring team feels a sense of conviction that they have performed their due diligence and secured the right person for the role. Both the company and the candidate are set up for success.

Effective sales management begins with the following:

- A defined sales process, from prospecting through onboarding
- Formal safety and compliance training early in the onboarding cycle
- Clear territory definitions and target market segments
- Regular collaboration between sales, operations and service teams
- Realistic expectations for ramp-up timelines
- Offering and receiving input for the salesperson

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Sales managers should prioritize field engagement, including ride-alongs and account reviews, to ensure sales activity aligns with company standards for customer quality, safety and service sustainability. Management must make sure the company culture is clearly conveyed. Time spent in the field observing tank installations, deliveries and service calls accelerates credibility and reduces costly sales errors.

Salesperson retention is also something management needs to be aware of. Salespeople who deliver profitable, well-supported customers create lasting value for their organizations. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers, in 2023, 20% of employees had considered leaving their role in the past year, rising to 25% of employees aged 18-24.

Top-performing propane companies train salespeople to follow a consistent, repeatable process:

1. *Territory and market analysis* — Identify propane-intensive segments, seasonal demand patterns and competitive dynamics. This is necessary to make realistic sales goals.
2. *Targeted prospecting* — Focus on off-grid residential areas, new construction, agricultural operations and commercial facilities with high energy reliability requirements.
3. *Consultative discovery* — Understand current supplier challenges, tank ownership, contract terms and future energy needs.
4. *Value-based selling* — Position service quality, safety standards and operational reliability alongside price.
5. *Structured onboarding* — Coordinate installations, inspections and customer education to ensure a strong first-year experience.

Developing successful propane salespeople requires more than hiring

experienced sellers. It demands intentional management, structured training and operational alignment. When sales teams understand the industry, respect the role of safety and service, and sell propane as a long-term energy partnership, companies position themselves for sustained growth in an increasingly competitive market. Building a long-term plan for the salesperson with goals, training and investment will ultimately pay off. 📌

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



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FAMILY-OWNED VALUES INFLUENCE CUSTOMERS WHEN IT MATTERS MOST

Values are what customers trust when they cannot see what is happening behind the scenes

BY BETH GASSER



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In a service business, trust is everything. People aren't just buying propane. They are also choosing who they will rely on when they have a question, a change in plans or a problem that needs a fast answer. For local and family-owned propane companies, that trust is tied to the values customers experience in the company's communication and their follow-through.

"Being family-owned means every decision still feels personal," said Kayla Hunstinger, an employee at Rahn's Oil & Propane in Minnesota. "The people we serve aren't account numbers. They're neighbors we see at the grocery store, kids our own children go to school with and families who trust us to keep their homes warm and safe and help their businesses run."

"It means our name is on every truck and every promise, and we carry that responsibility with pride. Doing right by people isn't a slogan for us. It's how we were raised."

One advantage family-owned or smaller, local companies often have is that their reputation is personal. The people answering the phone and managing routes live in the same community as their customers. That closeness creates a strong desire to do what is right and to do it consistently. Customers may never outright say, "I trust you because of your values," but they show it through their loyalty, referrals and patience during busy seasons.

VALUES SHOW UP IN THE MOMENTS THAT MATTER

Values become real when customers believe the company will listen and use good judgment. When a schedule changes or a problem comes up, customers trust a company that is willing to listen and help solve it. A values-led team can stay fair while still being flexible.

Customers don't always need the rules

changed, but they do want someone to hear them out. The team can ask a few questions, show compassion and understanding, and then explain the options clearly. This kind of steady, respectful communication builds trust because it lowers stress and feels personal and tailored to the customer's situation.

Additionally, values can show up in what a company will not do. Most customers are not propane experts, so they depend on the company for guidance.

Trust grows when a company avoids pressure and focuses on what the customer truly needs. That might mean being honest with customers about timelines, sharing realistic expectations or recommending a different option when it is right. It can also mean saying no when something is not safe or not appropriate. These moments matter because they prove the company is willing to protect the customer's best

interest, even when it would be easier to make a quick sale.

“Being a fourth-generation, family-owned propane company means building trust one relationship at a time, investing in our communities and serving our friends and neighbors well. It means making thoughtful decisions with long-term goals in mind versus short-term gains,” said Carly Fletcher, co-owner of B&P Propane.

GOODWILL THAT HELPS WEATHER THE HARD DAYS

Over time, consistent values create what can be thought of as a goodwill bank. When customers have a history of good experiences, they are more willing to stay calm when a problem happens. Weather can impact routes in many regions, but challenges can also come from demand swings, supply changes and packed schedules around holidays. That is why clear updates, realistic timelines and

straightforward answers matter so much. Even when the news is not perfect, honest communication protects the customer relationship.

This is where brand and operations need to match. A company can share its values online through its website, reviews, social posts and customer emails. These channels set expectations. The real test is whether the same tone and care show up offline through dispatch, delivery, service calls, billing and issue resolution. When the experience matches the message, customers feel confident in their decision to work with you. They sense competency because the company is clear, consistent and dependable.

For local and family-owned propane companies, values don’t live only in marketing. They show up in the words used with customers, the choices made when things get hard and the follow-through that proves promises matter.

They’re reflected in the online reviews they leave, the referrals that walk in the door and the cheers the bobtail gets when it rolls through the parade.

When values guide both online and offline communication, trust grows. And when trust grows, customers stay and they tell others why. When people share why they trust a company, the company’s values become visible to the next customer. How that shows up in a big way as a trust signal in local, AI-powered search is a topic for another day. ▀

Beth Gasser is a marketing strategist, content writer and an owner of four small businesses. Gasser has 30 years of marketing experience. She is a StoryBrand-certified coach who specializes in helping businesses clarify their message so customers and prospects listen. Gasser is a fierce champion of the undeniable kick-assery of small, rural propane businesses that want to grow. Visit vividpropanemarketing.com.



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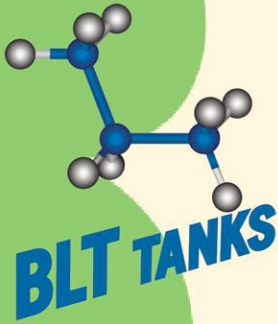
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ADVERTISER INDEX

Advertiser	Page
Alliance AutoGas	43
American Standard Mfg	10
Aultra Tank & Equipment	23
B&A Energy Partners.....	42
BLT Tanks LLC.....	52
Cargas	14
Cetane Associates.....	34
Eastern Energy Expo	51
Fairview USA Inc.....	IFC
Ferrellgas	3
Gray, Gray & Gray LLP	49
H&H Sales Company	48
ICOM North America	38
IPS Equipment Inc	33
Metsa Tanks	5
MID:COM.....	51
Modern Home Products	47
NPGA Southeastern & International Propane Expo	35
OPW Propane Energy Solutions: RegO/MEC	BC
Otodata Technologies USA Inc.....	11
Propane Education & Research Council	32,39
Quality Steel Corporation	1
RegO	22
Renaldo Sales & Service Inc.	49
Rural Computer Consultants	48
TerraVest Industries	28
Thieman Tailgates Inc.	41
TRIARC TANK	15
Westmor Industries LLC	37
Worthington Enterprises.....	IBC
Young Professionals Council.....	29

Jessica Balderston

Co-Owner/Head of Support
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How did you get your start in the propane industry?

I was fortunate to have my start in the propane industry come naturally through family. My grandfather founded a propane and natural gas company in Bird Island, Minnesota, back in 1952, so the business has been part of my life for as long as I can remember. In 1979, my father and uncle launched Rural Computer Consultants Inc. (RCC) with a very specific goal — developing routing and scheduling software to support my grandfather's propane operation. What began as a solution for one company has grown tremendously over the years. Today, I'm proud to be a second-generation owner of RCC alongside my brother and two cousins.

What major shifts over the years have had the biggest impact on the industry, and what positive changes have you seen come from them?

One of the biggest shifts in our industry has been the rapid advancement of technology. We've moved from manual processes and paper-driven tools to real-time data, smarter routing and AI-driven technology. These tools are helping propane marketers operate more efficiently, improve customer service and make better, safer decisions every day. What's been most positive is how adaptable this industry continues to be. Technology hasn't replaced people — it's empowered them. Our industry is constantly evolving, and that's exciting because it means we'll keep finding better, smarter ways to grow and serve our customers and communities.

Have there been any industry challenges you've encountered in your career that changed how you approach your role?

Working in customer service for propane and fuel marketers has shown me that this industry is constantly challenging everyone, and no two days are ever the same. One of the biggest lessons I've learned is that you can't judge what the person on the other end of the line is dealing with. They might be facing unusual weather, a propane shortage in their area or something completely unrelated to the industry, and it can affect how they're feeling or how urgent their issue seems. That experience has changed how I approach my role: I focus on giving people

grace, listening carefully and helping them resolve their problem as efficiently and empathetically as possible. It's about meeting them where they are and remembering that everyone's challenges matter.

How has the Women in Propane community influenced your experience in the industry?

The Women in Propane community has meant so much to me because it introduced me to some of the most incredible people I know. I've built real friendships, found mentors and gained confidence in myself and my place in the industry. Early on, stepping outside my comfort zone wasn't easy, but the encouragement and support I received from other women helped me grow in ways I didn't expect. In fact, if it weren't for that encouragement, I likely never would have stepped into my role as cohost of Women in Propane's podcast 'Through the Leadership Lens.' That experience has given me the opportunity to talk with inspiring people across our industry every week, hear their stories and continue learning from their journeys — something that has been incredibly meaningful to me both personally and professionally. What makes this community special is how genuinely women show up for each other. They share their experiences, offer guidance, celebrate wins — big or small — and remind you that you're never figuring things out alone. Being part of Women in Propane has shaped my journey, strengthened my confidence and inspired me to keep learning, growing and supporting others the same way I was supported.

What advice would you give to women who are considering a career in the propane industry?

My advice would be simple: Be yourself, ask all the questions and show up. It may feel intimidating at first, especially if you don't see a clear path yet, but that feeling doesn't last long. Our industry is full of supportive, welcoming people who genuinely want to help you succeed. The more you lean in, stay curious and get involved, the more opportunities will begin to appear. There's a place for you here — you just have to take that first step. ■

Find an extended Q&A with Jessica at bpnews.com/industryinsider.

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