

It's a Gas

Propane, also known as liquefied petroleum (LP) gas, widely is used on construction sites. Whether it's to thaw equipment such as a diesel engine that has sat on a jobsite overnight during the winter months, or to warm surfaces, such as before applying roofing materials, it's important to understand and properly use this fuel source. In addition, space heaters often are used to temporarily heat jobsite office trailers, and propane gas is a common option.

Know what you're using

As with anything, the proper use and handling of propane gas is essential for maintaining a safe, working environment. Propane gas comes in cylinders, typically up to 100 pounds, making this

Propane often is distributed in easy-to-transport 20- and 100-pound cylinders that make this fuel source ideal for the jobsite. Photo: iStockPhoto

fuel source incredibly portable and easy to transport. New cylinders are built with an automatic device that terminates the filling process once the tank reaches 80% capacity. This is a safety measure that accounts for the natural changes in volume liquid fuel experiences due to temperature changes. Safety devices and shut-off valves are a feature of propane engine fuel systems that will activate if a fuel line breaks.

As a nontoxic and nonpoisonous substance, it can't be ingested because the container pressurizes the liquid fuel, and upon release, the fuel is vaporized. If the container does leak, however, the gas will dissipate into the air and is easily detected because of its unique rotten-egg smell.

Propane has a low flammability range, so it won't ignite if it combines with air unless the ignition source is greater than 940° F.

If you or your employees would like to be trained on how to handle propane, equipment, and appliances, the Certified Employee Training Program is a nationally recognized program. For more information, visit www.npga.org.

Use common sense

When working with propane, it's important to take care to handle the cylinders with care. The National Propane Gas Association offers the following common-sense rules for handling propane.

- Setup the propane cylinders, as well as the equipment being powered, so they will not be damaged, tampered with, or under extreme temperatures.
- If using a heater, direct the heat away from the propane cylinders and position it at least 6 feet away.
- Store and use propane cylinders in an upright position. Make sure they are secured to avoid tipping or falling over when left unattended.
- Keep cylinders, valves, caps, and other connectors free of jobsite materials, such as concrete, dirt, dust, and ice, that can build up and affect the unit's performance.
- Do not use heaters where they may ignite combustible material, such as lumber or curing blankets.
- Make sure the area has sufficient ventilation.
- Make sure the equipment is in working order before using it and have it repaired by a qualified serviceman if repairs are needed. ■



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