

# How to Use LP Gas Safely

By Dan Markham

Propane, industry leaders say, has an excellent safety record. Still, it's a fuel, which means that it's hardly without risks. "You have to respect it and use it safely," says Richard Hess of the Oklahoma Liquid Propane Gas Research, Marketing and Safety Commission. "You've got to know the fuel.

The first step to knowing the fuel is learning what it smells like. Stuart Flatow, vice president of safety and training at the Propane Education and Resource Council (PERC) describes it as a "rotting egg smell." But a greater understanding of propane's smell is available at most propane retailers. A pamphlet is available with a scratch and sniff feature that enables the entire family to become familiar with its smell.

Propane leak detectors, which are similar to carbon monoxide detectors, are also available to provide peace of mind. Once familiar with the smell, the family should understand what should be done if that smell is detected inside the home. To Flatow, it's rather simple. "Consumers, if they are having issues, should immediately call a propane retailer rather than fix things themselves," Flatow says. "Shut down the source of power, leave the home and call from a cell phone or from a neighbor's home. Call the fire department or local supplier."

Frequently, the smell is the result of resident's fix-it efforts. Propane leaks sometimes develop when a stove is pulled away from a wall, breaching a connector, or when a resident is digging a fence post hole and nicks a line. Before digging, Flatow suggests, consumers should call the retailer to learn where digging is unsafe.

Another important consideration for the homeowner is to keep flammable materials away from propane appliances. Moreover, propane appliances such as grills should not be kept in the home.

Other helpful hints for appliance maintenance include:

- All furnaces can collect lint and dirt and should be cleaned regularly.
- Always keep the range surface clean.
- Schedule regular preventive maintenance checks for all appliances.
- Never use gas ranges for space heating.
- Never allow children to turn the burner control knobs on your propane range.

Most LP gas dealers offer a “keep filled” program for their customers. “We encourage consumers to stay on keep filled status,” says Hess, indicating that such a decision means the retailer will fill the tanks filled every few weeks, rather than after calls from consumers. But even consumers on keep filled status should be aware of how much gas is in the tank. “You should be aware of what you’re using. If you need to fill up monthly and it’s a week later and you need it filled, (you may have a problem),” Hess says.

When using a gas grill, LP gas distributors offer these gas grill safety tips.

- Always use the grill outdoors in a well-ventilated area, following all manufacturers’ instructions.
- Make sure the grill burner controls are turned off and the cylinder valve closed when not in use.
- Store cylinders in an upright, vertical position.
- When a cylinder is refilled, check for dents, damage, rust, etc.
- When a grill is not in use, cover disconnected hose-end fittings and burner air intakes with small plastic bags.
- Don’t smoke while handling propane cylinder.

LP Gas is safe and convenient to use, but as with any fuel should be handled with caution.