

OCTOBER 2026

BUTANE-PROPANE NEWS

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2026 Propane Survey Results:
The 5 Main Things You Should Know

Marketer Spotlight: Matador Gas

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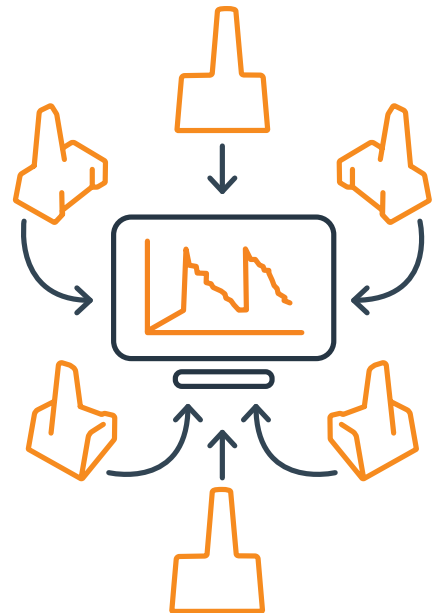
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Dear Readers,
Something is happening to the “Coyote vs. Acme” movie that was not initially in its destiny: It’s being shown in theaters. Originally a tax write-off doomed to never reach audiences, the movie is finding unexpected success across theatres globally; it has now surpassed the \$82 million mark as I write this.

The live-action animated movie focuses on the story of Wile E. Coyote attempting to seek justice against the corrupt, opportunistic corporation Acme. I wasn’t expecting to walk out of the theater with a renewed appreciation of the value of our collective laws and the plight of underdogs seeking justice in a system that often seems built to keep them down.

It is in this same spirit that BPN offers the Legal & Liability Challenges feature section to our readers. The majority of propane companies are still small and/or family-owned businesses serving local communities — and those that have found success in acquisition deals make a point of keeping their homegrown, people-first company culture alive and well. Much like Wile E. Coyote, propane providers are often the underdog. For larger propane companies, legal cases establish important lessons to inform company practice and regulations going forward.

On page 24, Dan Cramer of First West Insurance explores the importance of being protected by pollution insurance, dispelling common myths surrounding this specific type of coverage among propane marketers. Flip over to page 28 for a special edition of Propane & the Law, where legal expert David Schlee lays out an ongoing case against a propane heater manufacturer.

On page 33, the National Propane Gas Association’s Nicholas Edward explores the recent extension of a group of clean transportation grants and the impact of similar government funding on propane autogas — both in the short and long term.

For safety and financial resources that overlap with legal considerations, take a look at the article from Grammer Logistics on page 16 regarding the appropriate handling of propane transportation emergencies. On page 22, training expert Carl Weeks shares insights into the precautions that must be taken when preparing to install an underground propane tank — key considerations to avoid endangering your propane technicians and customers alike. And for guidance on navigating finances during times of economic uncertainty from Scooter Thomas, turn to page 40.

Reading through these informative contributions from our October contributors, I am struck by a common takeaway: The best legal defense is a proactive dedication to putting people first.

Here’s to the underdogs.

Sincerely,

JOHNNY NICKEL

Managing Editor



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VOLUME 58 ISSUE 10

October 2026



Feature Series: LEGAL & LIABILITY CHALLENGES

- 24 If Propane Boils Off, Why Does a Retailer Need Pollution Insurance?**
With the right coverage, propane retailers can address the financial risks of accidental releases, even when no long-term environmental contamination remains
- 28 'Propane & the Law' Special Edition: South Carolina Tank-Top Heater Litigation Continues**
The case hinges on whether adequate warnings defeat a product defect claim under state law

Special Section: INTERNATIONAL INSIGHTS

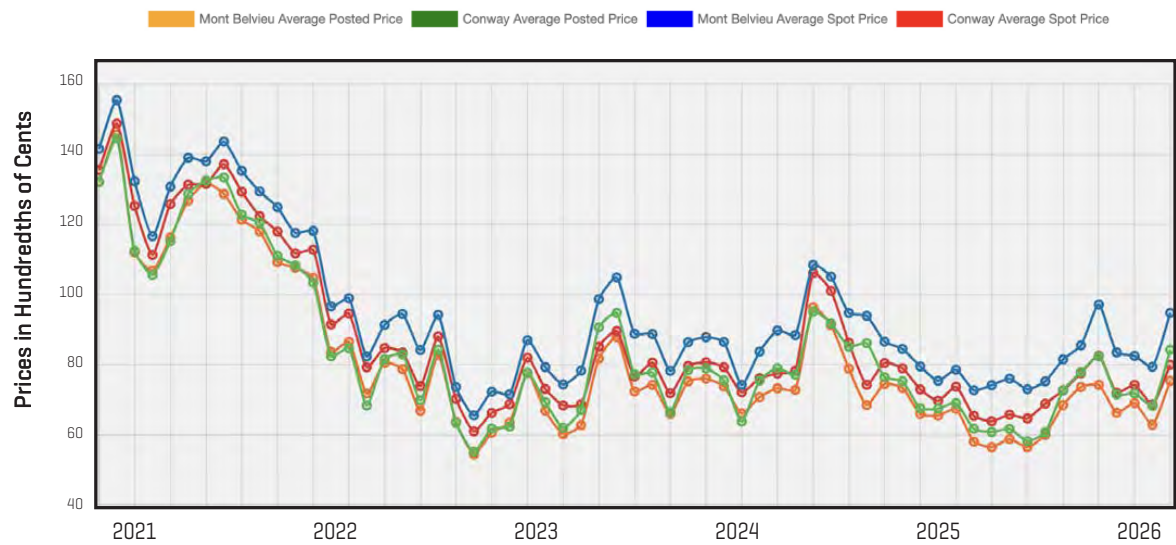
- 30 WLGA & IEA Host LPG Leadership Forum**
The forum discussed LPG supply resilience in a high-risk world



On the Cover
Legal and liability challenges are not always avoidable, but insurance coverage and planning provide the protection propane companies need when situations arise.
(German-stock.adobe.com)

- 4 Marketplace**
- 6 News & Events**
- 10 The Fueling Station**
- 12 Verbatim**
If you had unlimited resources, what bold experiment would you try in your business?
- 16 Beyond the Mains**
When every second counts: Preparing for propane transportation emergencies
- 18 Resource Center**
Women in Propane Leadership Retreat fuels strategic vision for growth & engagement
- 22 Equipment**
Marketers can ensure a smooth process for customers by checking these important items off the list
- 33 Public Policy**
Propane autogas grants: Short-term & long-term assessment
- 36 Strategy**
What the 2026 Propane Survey says about where the industry is headed
- 38 Management**
8 steps to implement long-term change in the workplace
- 40 Finance**
Steady in the storm: Managing financial risk in uncertain economic times
- 42 Marketer Spotlight**
Matador Gas
- 47 Advertiser Index**
- 48 Industry Insider**

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 15.375 cents/gal, from August mid-month to September mid-month, and spot prices increased 15.875 cents. Conway, Kansas, postings increased 11.275 cents/gal and spots increased 12.5 cents over the month.

MID-WEEK AVERAGE POSTED/SPOT PROPANE PRICES [Cents per Gallon]

	08/13/26	08/20/26	08/27/26	09/03/26	09/10/26
Mont Belvieu					
posted	79.375	84.500	80.000	86.375	94.750
spot	68.125 – 68.375	74.000 – 74.375	67.500 – 68.625	77.375 – 78.000	84.000 – 84.500
Conway					
posted	68.685	73.310	68.870	74.525	79.960
spot	62.500 – 63.250	67.875 – 68.500	62.500 – 63.500	70.250 – 70.750	75.000 – 75.750

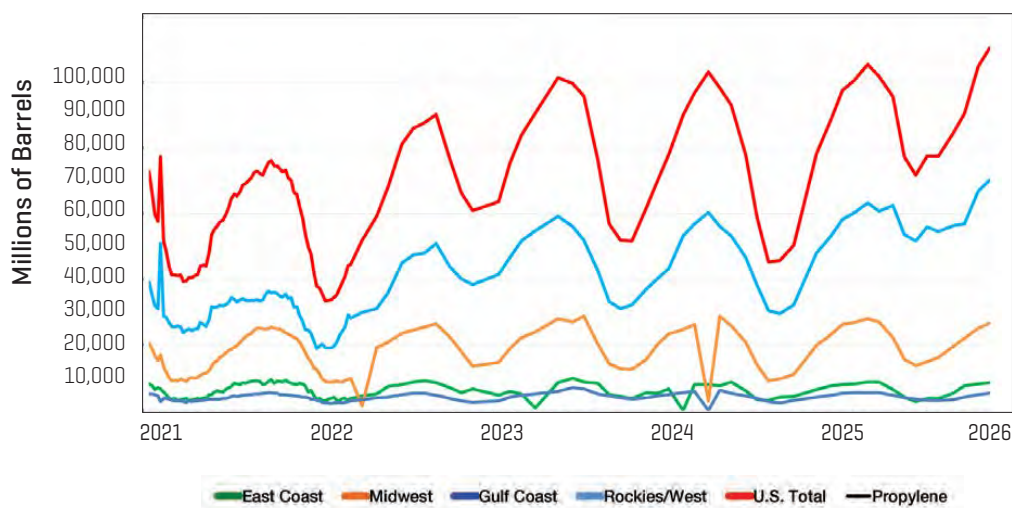
at a glance Canada’s primary underground propane inventories increased by 32.8% in August, according to the Canada Energy Regulator [CER]. The total represented a month-to-month increase of 369.7 Mcm. Compared to a year earlier, stocks were higher, with 243.1 Mcm, or 19.4%, more product on hand. *[Editor’s Note: Due to BPN’s publishing schedule, August inventory data is the latest available from the CER.]*

CANADIAN INVENTORIES [Thousand Cubic Meters]

	Aug 2026	Jul 2026	Change	Aug 2025
PROPANE				
Propane-East	411.6	289.1	42.4%	392.9
Propane-West	1084.1	836.9	29.5%	859.8
Total Propane	1495.7	1126.0	32.8%	1252.6
BUTANE				
Butane-East	459.0	339.1	35.4%	553.2
Butane-West	742.6	709.6	4.7%	776.1
Total Butane	1201.6	1048.7	14.6%	1329.3

Source: Canada Energy Regulator

U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES



at a glance

United States propane stocks experienced a 5.496 MMbbl increase from August to September. East Coast stocks increased 408,000 bbl, the Midwest increased 1.556 MMbbl, the Gulf Coast increased 3.253 MMbbl, and the Rocky Mountain/ West Coast increased 278,000 bbl. Compared to the same time in September 2025, the September 2026 U.S. stocks were 12.836 MMbbl higher.

U.S. PROPANE INVENTORIES

Aug. 7 – Sept. 4, 2026, and One Year Ago [Thousand Barrels]

	08/07/26	08/14/26	08/21/26	08/28/26	09/04/26	09/05/25
East Coast	8.107	8.289	8.141	7.858	8.515	7.908
Midwest	25.006	26.154	26.644	26.176	26.562	26.323
Gulf Coast	66.943	67.819	69.608	68.182	70.196	58.174
Rocky Mtn & West Coast	4.918	4.752	5.090	5.195	5.196	5.228
U.S.	104.974	107.013	109.483	107.411	110.470	97.634

Editor's Note: From April to the beginning of October, the Energy Information Administration does not report residential prices for propane. Publication of this data will resume with the November 2026 issue.

Find out more:

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

DOT BLOCKS CALIFORNIA DISPOSABLE PROPANE CYLINDER BAN

The Department of Transportation (DOT) is blocking a California law that would have banned the sale of disposable propane cylinders beginning in 2028, arguing the state cannot outlaw the small fuel canisters when they are allowed under federal rules. The dispute centers on the small, typically one-pound propane canisters sold at camping, hardware and big-box stores. They are designed to be used until empty and then discarded rather than refilled. California passed a law in 2024 requiring nearly all propane cylinders sold in the state to be reusable or refillable starting Jan. 1, 2028. But the Transportation Department's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration determined that California was trying to impose its own requirements on containers that are already regulated by the federal government. The Transportation Department concluded that California cannot require a disposable propane cylinder to be designed differently from what federal rules allow, finding the state law conflicts with the federal government's goal of maintaining one set of nationwide standards for transporting hazardous materials. The decision deals a setback to California's effort to reduce the number of disposable propane cylinders entering landfills and recycling facilities. Supporters of the California law argue the canisters are more than a waste problem. Even after they appear empty, cylinders can contain leftover propane or pressure and can explode if they are crushed or compacted by garbage trucks or equipment at waste facilities.

2026 NATIONAL PROPANE INDUSTRY SURVEY RESULTS RELEASED

Gray, Gray & Gray — a Frazier & Deeter Company announced the release of its annual Propane Industry Survey results. The survey serves as an important benchmark for propane marketers throughout the United States. The 2026 Propane Industry Survey results are based on reported operational and financial data for the heating season spanning April

2025 through March 2026. This year's survey featured additional operational insights from Angus Energy and the Propane Education & Research Council. The survey was presented in partnership with Warm Thoughts Communications. Some of the highlights from the results of the 2026 Propane Industry Survey include:

- Use of artificial intelligence by propane dealers has increased significantly during the past year, with 65% reporting they have incorporated AI into their business operations — a jump of 46% over 2025.
- Recruiting and retention of personnel continues to be a challenge for dealers. Nearly half (47%) report between one and five open positions.
- While 65% of dealers responding to the survey report they have a formal marketing budget, 40% of companies spend less than 2% of their gross revenues on marketing.
- Despite numerous challenges facing the propane industry, only 1% of dealers reported a decline in profitability, while 66% have increased their per-gallon profit margin.

Complete results of the 2026 Propane Industry Survey, including a breakdown by region, are available tinyurl.com/2026-propane-survey. See page 36 for five key takeaways for propane marketers.

EIA FORECASTS HIGH OIL PRICES THROUGH END OF 2026

Editor's Note: A version of this news first appeared in the Energy Information Administration's (EIA) Short-Term Energy Outlook.

The EIA forecasts oil production in the Middle East will rise in the coming months because of gradually increasing flows through the Strait of Hormuz and the use of alternative routes out of the region, according to its September 2026 Short-Term Energy Outlook (STEO). However, the EIA assumes some constraints to exporting oil from the Middle East will persist through the end of the year, which keeps crude oil production in the region below pre-conflict averages until the second quarter of 2027. Global

oil prices rose to an average of \$91 per barrel (bbl) in August, \$7/bbl higher than in July. Prices remain elevated in response to falling global oil inventories, which the EIA estimates have decreased by 400 million barrels so far this year. The EIA expects inventories will continue falling through the end of 2026, which will keep prices near the August monthly average in the coming months. The organization now forecasts the Brent crude oil spot price to average around \$90/bbl in 2H26. As oil production rises into next year, and as inventories rebuild, the EIA expects the Brent spot price to gradually fall to an average of \$74/bbl in 2027. The EIA forecasts U.S. distillate fuel oil inventories will drop below 100 million barrels in September and will remain below the five-year (2021–2025) low through much of 2027. Tightness in the global distillate market has raised domestic prices and incentivized U.S. exporters to increase distillate exports. The EIA assumes global production of distillate fuel will remain below last year's levels in the coming months, contributing to low U.S. diesel inventories and high diesel prices. U.S. natural gas inventories are on track to be above the five-year average at the start of winter. The EIA forecasts natural gas inventories will total 3,969 billion cubic feet on Oct. 31 — the end of the injection season — 5% above the five-year average. Rising natural gas production in the Permian and Haynesville regions has supported inventory builds over the summer. The United States uses record amounts of electricity in the EIA's forecast. The organization expects electricity sales in the United States to total 4,135 billion kilowatthours (BkWh) in 2026 and 4,211 BkWh in 2027, driven by data center development and increased manufacturing activity in the commercial and industrial sectors. Despite a pause in connecting new data center projects in Texas to the grid, the West South Central region accounts for the largest share of total electricity sales growth in the forecast. The EIA finalized inputs into the model on Sept. 3. This forecast does not specifically account for market events after that day.



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NEW YORK JUDGE BLOCKS STATE'S CLIMATE CHANGE SUPERFUND ACT

The U.S. District Court for the Northern District of New York struck down the state's Climate Change Superfund Act, ruling that New York may not impose strict liability on energy companies for their alleged contributions to global greenhouse gas emissions. The Climate Change Superfund Act, which New York enacted in 2024, purported to impose billions of dollars on domestic and foreign energy companies that extract fossil fuels or refine crude oil. A coalition of states and trade organizations sued, alleging the act is preempted by the federal Clean Air Act and by the federal foreign affairs power, and that the act violates the Constitution. After the case was consolidated with a suit filed by a different coalition of trade organizations, the Justice Department filed a statement of interest and presented oral argument in support of the plaintiffs. The court agreed that the New York Climate Change Superfund Act is preempted by the Clean Air Act and by the federal foreign affairs power, and the court held that the Climate Act is invalid. The government has also filed a complaint in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York challenging the same Climate Change Superfund Act, as well as a complaint in the U.S. District Court for the District of Vermont challenging Vermont's Climate Superfund Act, which seeks to recover an unspecified amount from the same energy companies targeted by the New York Act. In those suits, the government alleges that both acts are preempted by the federal Clean Air Act and by the federal foreign affairs power, and that they violate the U.S. Constitution.

MID-MONTH TO MID-MONTH: MID-SEPTEMBER DOWN FROM AUGUST

During the latest mid-month period, prices at Mont Belvieu, Texas, increased. The posted prices increased 15.375 cents/gal from August mid-month to September mid-month, while the spot prices increased 15.875 cents. Conway, Kansas, postings increased 11.275 cents/gal, and spots increased 12.5 cents over the month.

The Mont Belvieu mid-August posted price was 79.375 cents/gal. The next week the price increased 5.125 cents to 84.5 cents/gal, followed by a 4.5-cent decrease to 80 cents/gal. Postings increased 6.375 cents to 86.375 cents/gal the first week of September, followed by a 8.375-cent increase to 94.75 cents/gal at mid-month. Compared to the same time last year, the September 2026 prices were 16.27 cents higher. The Conway mid-August posted price was 68.685 cents/gal. The next week the price increased 4.625 cents to 73.31 cents/gal, followed by a 4.44-cent decrease to 68.87 cents/gal. Postings increased 5.655 cents to 74.525 cents/gal the first week of September, followed by a 5.435-cent increase to 79.96 cents/gal at mid-month. Compared to the same time last year, the September 2026 prices were 5.547 cents higher. Mont Belvieu spots opened mid-August at 68.125 cents/gal. The next week the price increased 5.875 cents to 74 cents/gal, followed by a 6.5-cent decrease to 67.5 cents/gal the next week. Spots increased 9.875 cents to 77.375 cents/gal the first week of September, followed by a 6.625-cent increase to 84 cents at mid-month. Compared to the same time last year, the September 2026 prices were 17 cents higher. Conway spots opened mid-August at 62.5 cents/gal. The next week the price increased 5.375 cents to 67.875 cents/gal, followed by a 5.375-cent decrease to 62.5 cents/gal the next week. Spots increased 7.75 cents to 70.25 cents/gal the first week of September, followed by a 4.75-cent increase to 75 cents/gal at mid-month. Compared to the same time last year, the September 2026 prices were 8 cents higher.

COLONIAL GROUP ACQUIRES FOSTER FUELS

Foster Fuels Inc. announced that it has entered into an agreement to be acquired by Colonial Group Inc. Colonial is a Savannah, Georgia-based, family-owned and -operated, diversified family of companies that specialize in energy, chemical, logistics and transportation sectors. According to the company, Foster customers, employees and business partners can expect continuity

of service through operations, services and relationships. Foster will continue to serve customers under the same brand and leadership. Foster and Colonial share a commitment to preserving what makes Foster successful, while providing additional resources and long-term investment to support future growth. This partnership positions Foster for continued growth, while strengthening its ability to serve customers throughout and beyond its current service areas. By joining Colonial, Foster will gain access to additional resources, expanded capabilities and long-term investment that support the company's future. Also founded in 1921, Colonial was established with similar values and a similar mission to those that have guided Foster Fuels for more than a century. Foster believes the strong alignment between the two organizations' cultures, leadership philosophies and commitment to customers made Colonial the right partner for the future. While the acquisition will expand the combined organization's capabilities and geographic reach, leaders from both companies view the announcement as something far more significant than a business transaction. Foster and Colonial share a belief that businesses have a responsibility to strengthen the communities they serve. Foster's longstanding tradition of community involvement, including the impact of the Foster Foundation, reflects values that closely align with Colonial's own commitment to service and stewardship. The Foster Foundation will remain an independent organization, and both companies remain committed to supporting their communities. All Foster Fuels employees are expected to continue with the organization, and customers will continue working with the same team. Colonial is committed to supporting employees throughout the integration process while building upon expertise, relationships and customer focus. Together, the companies are committed to ensuring the values, relationships and service that defined their first century. Financial terms of the transaction were not disclosed. ■

Industry Calendar

Oct. 12-13 Mid-Atlantic PGA Fall Meeting

mapga.org
Flinstone, MD

Oct. 13-14 Michigan PGA Fall Quarterly Board Meeting

mipga.org
Frankenmuth, MI

Oct. 14-15 PGANE Annual Meeting

pgane.org
Portsmouth, NH

Oct. 20 Pennsylvania PGA Capitol Day

papropane.com
Harrisburg, PA

Oct. 20-21 Ohio PGA Quarterly Membership Meeting

ohioproganegas.org
Westerville, OH

Oct. 23-26 NYPGA Fall Board of Directors Meeting

nypropane.com
Saratoga, NY

Oct. 28 Missouri PGA Board of Directors Meeting

propanemissouri.com
Jefferson City, MO

Nov. 11 Illinois PGA Board Meeting

ilpga.org
Springfield, IL

Nov. 12 Oklahoma PGA Board Meeting

okpropane.org
Oklahoma City, OK

Nov. 18 Kansas – PMAK Board Meeting

pmak.org
Topeka, KS

Dec. 3-4 PERC Council Meeting

propane.com
Charleston, SC

Dec. 16 NJPGA Winter Board of Directors Meeting

njpga.org
Trenton, NJ

FOR ADDITIONAL CALENDAR ITEMS, VISIT BPNEWS.COM.

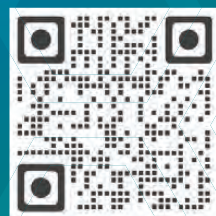


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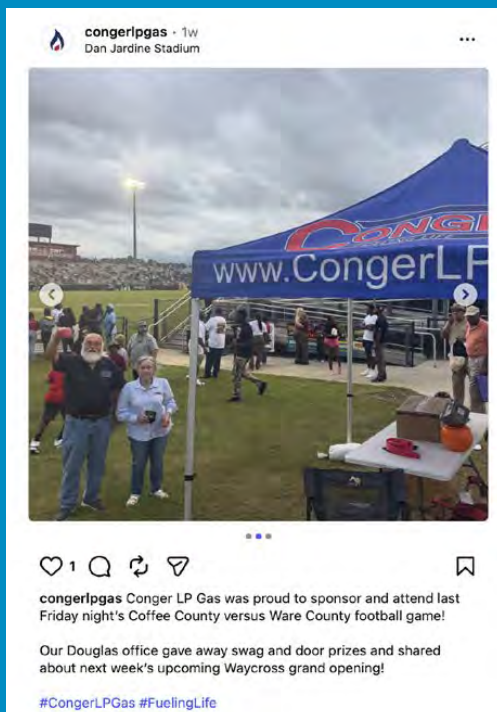


Scan to learn more

THE FUELING STATION

This season is a time of renewal — leaves are getting a “fresh new coat,” a new school year is back in session and (hopefully) most of the summer heat has gracefully bowed out to welcome cooler temps. Propane companies are sure to be getting ready for the fast-approaching heating season, and in some cases have already started. Before the flurry of activity fully ramps up, here’s how propane companies spent the final days of summer.







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SCAN TO FIND THE RIGHT TANK



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 HAD UNLIMITED RESOURCES, WHAT BOLD EXPERIMENT WOULD YOU TRY IN YOUR BUSINESS?

Propane professionals share big dreams that would make big impacts

We all have that one idea tucked away — the one that gets shot down in budget meetings before it ever sees daylight. This month, we asked propane pros to set the spreadsheets aside for a second and dream a little bigger: If money, time and red tape were no object, what's the one bold experiment you'd finally unleash on your business? The answers ranged from practical to downright ambitious — proof that even in a steady, no-nonsense

industry like ours, there's no shortage of big ideas waiting for their moment.

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

BUILDING A BUSINESS AROUND MORE THAN PROFIT

Given unlimited resources, I would hire as many engaged and happy employees

as possible while remaining financially viable. If new employees were a great culture fit and had a contributing skill set, I'd enthusiastically bring them on board. I once read that the world would be very different (in a positive way) if the goal of business was to employ as many good people as possible rather than trying to capture a customer, maximize profit or increase shareholder value. As long as the business stayed financially viable, I would want the diversity of experience, perspective and thought that more employees bring. By maximizing their workforce, companies would compete more on being exceptional places to work rather than competing for customers, market share or revenue. I see it as a scenario where all stakeholders win.

DON MONTROY
BERGQUIST INC.
ROCKFORD, MICHIGAN

TRY, FAIL, LEARN, REPEAT

Truthfully, I think you should be testing out new ideas often in business — big or small. When you stick to the 'this is how we've always done it' mindset, you might be unintentionally setting yourself up for failure. Yes, you still might fail



IMAGEFLOW - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

when you try something new; however, the things you learn in the process far outweigh any ‘failure’ — most of the time (but that’s always a risk I’m willing to take). Throughout my entire career and especially where I’m at now, we have the support and backing to try new things while continuing to represent the values and brand of our company, and it’s a wonderful thing to be a part of!

STEPH HENNEN
LAKES GAS CO.
WYOMING, MINNESOTA

COMING TO A SHARK TANK NEAR YOU

If I had unlimited resources, I would most likely add some diversification to my business. I have always wanted to sell a product that appealed to the masses, and I am a firm believer in the convenience of a propane grill (versus charcoal or a smoker). With that said, I would find or invent a unique product or accessory that made propane grilling better or more convenient. I would then ship this product nationwide and sell direct to consumers, maybe even making an appearance on Shark Tank to grow sales even more.

TREVOR BEAUDRY
BEAUDRY OIL & PROPANE
ELK RIVER, MINNESOTA

THE 32-HOUR WORKWEEK

If I had unlimited resources, I’d try to build a propane company where everyone could work 32 hours a week, make the same money and get more done. I’d throw technology, automation and AI at every wasted hour, repetitive task and unnecessary process until we found out how much of the traditional workweek is actually necessary. The experiment wouldn’t really be about technology. It would be about what people can accomplish when we give them their time back.

MIKE DODD
PROPANE NINJA
TAMPA, FLORIDA

WHY EVERY OPTION SHOULD’VE BEEN ON THE TRUCK

To be able to purchase every option, no matter what, in both our bobtails and service trucks, to make our job as easy as possible. Everyone knows this — after the fact of purchasing one of these vehicles, people wished they had a certain item that may have been available, but you may have said to yourself, ‘We will never use that.’ And then that day arrives, and now you do.

RICHARD STRYCHARZ JR.
WALTER’S PROPANE
SUNDERLAND, MASSACHUSETTS

INVESTING IN THE NEXT GENERATION

If I had unlimited resources for my business, I would hire young people who are eager to learn and work. I would teach them the value of putting in the time to get better. They would also be subject to helping others in the community. This helps them understand the real world and how business affects them. So many young people have grown up in a predictable and scheduled environment. Many are never exposed to failure, disappointment or criticism. Adding retired businesspeople who have succeeded and failed can also impact the young people. The goal would be to make the young people professional and successful through hard work and humility. Life is not predictable. Business also has its challenges and needs to be managed by strong and confident people.

ED VARNEY
TOPLINE MANAGEMENT
MCKINNEY, TEXAS

ONE-STOP SHOP STATUS

If I had unlimited resources, I’d love to explore adding electrical services to our business. We already offer so many of the services our customers need for their homes, and with the number of

requests we get for generators, electrical feels like a natural fit. It would be a big undertaking and require additional staff, training and expertise, but with unlimited resources, I think it would be exciting to see how much more of a true one-stop shop we could become for our customers.

STACI RAMMEL
WOODRUFF ENERGY
BRIDGETON, NEW JERSEY

BRINGING THE LP GAS EXPERIENCE TO LIFE

If I had unlimited resources at our company, I'd build an 'LP Gas Experience Trailer.' We already have a demonstration kitchen at one of our locations, but I think taking that concept on the road would be an incredible opportunity. I'd love to have a fully functioning mobile demonstration space that we could take to our different locations and community events, where customers,

builders and families could see and experience propane in action. It would be an engaging way to educate people about propane, showcase everything it can do and bring the LP gas experience directly to the communities we serve.

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

LEARNING FROM FAILURE

I would want to build a 'Failure Simulator' that can safely replicate any and all the methods in which our products could fail (even catastrophically) so we can learn and adapt and build the safest product in the world, guaranteed.

ROBERT KENNEY
METSIA
MCCALLUM, TEXAS

FOR THE PEOPLE

What struck me most about this month's

answers wasn't the size of the ideas — it was the heart behind them. Bigger trucks and bold gadgets made the list, sure, but so did better workplaces, bolder risks and creative ways to bring propane directly into the communities we serve.

The common thread? Given the chance to dream bigger, our industry doesn't dream selfishly — it dreams about doing right by people. So, here's to the bold ideas, the "what ifs" and the propane pros brave enough to say them out loud.

Keep dreaming big — we'll be here to capture it every step of the way. ▀

If you are interested in submitting responses, please contact Parsley at wparsley@cetane.com.

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Angela Branchi is senior vice president of strategic growth & business development at Grammer Logistics, bringing nearly four decades of experience in LPG/NGL transportation. Beginning her career as a dispatcher in 1988, she has held leadership roles spanning operations, sales and business development, with a continued focus on safety, customer service and industry growth. Visit grammerlogistics.com.

WHEN EVERY SECOND COUNTS: PREPARING FOR PROPANE TRANSPORTATION EMERGENCIES

Grammer Logistics partners with SEPA to strengthen first responder training

When a propane transportation incident occurs, first responders have little time to determine what they are facing. Understanding the equipment before an emergency happens can make a critical difference.

That was the focus of a three-day first responder training program hosted by the Southeast Propane Alliance (SEPA) from July 20-22. The program brought firefighters and emergency response professionals together for hands-on training sessions in Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina.

Grammer Logistics participated in all three sessions, providing its MC-331 Safety Cutaway Trailer, along with a team representing safety, operations, professional drivers and business development.

Representing Grammer were Rick Mabe, southeast safety manager; Brian Waddington, northeast safety manager; Julius Badger, director of eastern operations; Joe Riddle, professional driver; and myself as senior vice president of business development.

SEEING THE EQUIPMENT UP CLOSE

Propane transportation equipment can

be unfamiliar to emergency responders. An MC-331 cargo tank looks and operates differently from the propane storage and distribution equipment commonly found at residential, commercial and industrial locations. That is what makes hands-on training so valuable.

The Safety Cutaway Trailer allowed participants to examine the construction, components and safety systems of an MC-331 cargo tank. Rather than relying solely on classroom instruction, responders could see the equipment firsthand, understand how its components work together and ask questions based on what they were observing.

Partnering with SEPA on these trainings gave first responders valuable hands-on experience with equipment they may encounter in an emergency. Grammer was proud to share its knowledge and support training that helps keep responders, drivers and communities safe.

The sessions addressed equipment identification, hazard recognition, emergency response procedures and incident management. Familiarity in each of these areas can help responders make faster, better-informed decisions

about approaching the equipment, establishing safe zones and managing an incident.

TRAINING BEFORE THE EMERGENCY

Firefighters and emergency personnel routinely prepare for situations they hope never occur. The goal is to build enough knowledge and confidence that, when an emergency does happen, the response is guided by preparation — not by trying to understand unfamiliar equipment in real time.

That principle is especially important in propane transportation. Responders may encounter a vehicle or cargo tank that has been damaged in a collision, exposed to fire or otherwise compromised. Quickly recognizing the equipment and understanding its potential hazards provides a foundation for sound decision-making.

The SEPA program also gave responders direct access to professionals who work with propane transportation equipment every day.

Grammer's team brought several perspectives to the discussion. Mabe and Waddington contributed safety expertise, Badger provided an operational viewpoint and Riddle shared



The Grammer Logistics and SEPA teams gather for a picture in front a bobtail tank.

the practical experience of a professional driver responsible for inspecting and operating the equipment on the road. The discussion I led offered a broader perspective on customer needs and the propane transportation industry.

Together, these sessions were more than equipment demonstrations. The training became a conversation among professionals with different responsibilities but one shared objective: ensuring everyone goes home safely.

“From an operations standpoint, preparation and communication are critical when an incident occurs,” said Badger. “Giving first responders hands-on exposure to our equipment before an emergency helps them better understand what they’re dealing with and allows everyone to respond more safely and effectively.”

BUILDING FAMILIARITY ACROSS THE INDUSTRY

Programs like SEPA’s first responder training also create connections among

groups that may not regularly have reason to work together.

Transportation companies, propane marketers, emergency responders, safety professionals and industry associations each see a different part of the safety picture. Bringing those groups together allows them to better understand one another’s responsibilities, challenges and needs.

A firefighter can explain what responders need to know when arriving at an incident. A professional driver can describe how the equipment is inspected and operated each day. A safety professional can connect those experiences to emergency procedures, regulatory requirements and industry best practices.

That exchange of practical knowledge strengthens preparation across the entire propane supply chain.

Training programs like this are a great opportunity for propane equipment providers to share their equipment expertise and connect with the people

and organizations advancing propane safety throughout the country.

A SHARED COMMITMENT TO SAFETY

Safety is built into every stage of propane transportation, from inspecting and loading a cargo tank to traveling the highway and delivering product to the customer. But the industry’s responsibility does not end when a vehicle leaves the terminal.

SEPA’s three-day program demonstrated the value of bringing responders, equipment and industry professionals together before an emergency occurs. By putting first responders face-to-face with an MC-331 cargo tank and the people who work with it every day, the training transformed unfamiliar equipment into something they could more readily recognize, understand and respond to.

That preparation is time well spent. When every second counts, familiarity with the equipment can make the difference. 🚒

WOMEN IN PROPANE LEADERSHIP RETREAT FUELS STRATEGIC VISION FOR GROWTH & ENGAGEMENT

Women in Propane leaders gathered to strengthen key programs, expand member engagement & develop strategies for the organization's continued growth

BY THE WOMEN IN PROPANE COUNCIL

IMAGES COURTESY WOMEN IN PROPANE COUNCIL

Whitney O'Toole [right] is honored for her service as the former Women in Propane chair.



In July, Women in Propane board members and volunteer leaders gathered in Arizona for the organization's second-annual strategy retreat, a collaborative event focused on shaping the future of Women in Propane and strengthening its impact across the propane industry.

The retreat provided an opportunity for leaders from across the country to evaluate current programs, discuss new opportunities and develop strategies to support continued growth. Key topics included communications and outreach, membership development, volunteer engagement, expansion of the DiSC behavioral assessment program and growth of the Knowledge Exchange mentorship program.

More importantly, the retreat offered dedicated time for board members to connect, share ideas and align around a common vision for the future of the organization.

STRATEGIC CONVERSATIONS THAT MOVE THE ORGANIZATION FORWARD

As Women in Propane continues to evolve, leaders recognized the importance of ensuring programs and resources remain relevant to the needs of members at every career stage.

Chair Mandy Swanson said the retreat provided an invaluable opportunity to focus on long-term planning and organizational growth.

"The strategy retreat is foundational for the council because it allows us to step back and think strategically about how we can best serve our members," said Swanson. "We had meaningful discussions about our current programs, future opportunities and ways to continue expanding our impact throughout the industry."

Through facilitated discussions and brainstorming sessions, participants identified opportunities to strengthen

existing initiatives while exploring new ways to deliver value to members.

"Whether we were discussing communications, mentorship, professional development or membership growth, the focus remained on creating opportunities that help our members succeed," Swanson added.

INCREASING COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH

One of the primary focus areas was increasing communications and outreach efforts. As Women in Propane continues to expand its reach, leaders discussed strategies to increase awareness of the organization's mission, programs and professional development opportunities.

Board members explored ways to better share member success stories, increase engagement through digital channels and strengthen relationships with propane marketers, industry

partners and state propane associations.

Vice Chair Megan Sharp emphasized the importance of ensuring industry professionals understand the value of becoming involved.

“Building our organization begins with building relationships,” Sharp said. “We want everyone — whether they’re just starting out in the industry or bring years of leadership experience — to feel welcomed, valued and empowered to get involved.”

Leaders agreed that outreach efforts should focus not only on attracting new members, but also on fostering a welcoming community where individuals feel supported and encouraged to participate.

“There are talented, driven professionals across the propane industry who stand to benefit from the connections and resources Women in Propane offers,” Sharp said. “This retreat gave us a chance to take a step back, rethink

how we tell our story and find better ways to communicate what membership really offers — networking, leadership development and professional growth.”

EXPANDING THE DISC PROGRAM

The Women in Propane DiSC program continues to be one of the organization’s most impactful professional development offerings. The program helps participants better understand communication styles, strengthen workplace relationships and enhance leadership effectiveness.

During the retreat, board members discussed ways to increase participation and expand awareness of the program throughout the industry.

DiSC Committee Chair Jennifer Jackson noted that feedback from participants consistently highlights the program’s value.

“We’ve seen firsthand how impactful the DiSC program can be,” said Jackson.



Jennifer Jackson (right) receives the Women in Propane MVP award.

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Mandy Swanson and Jackson lead discussions at the meeting.

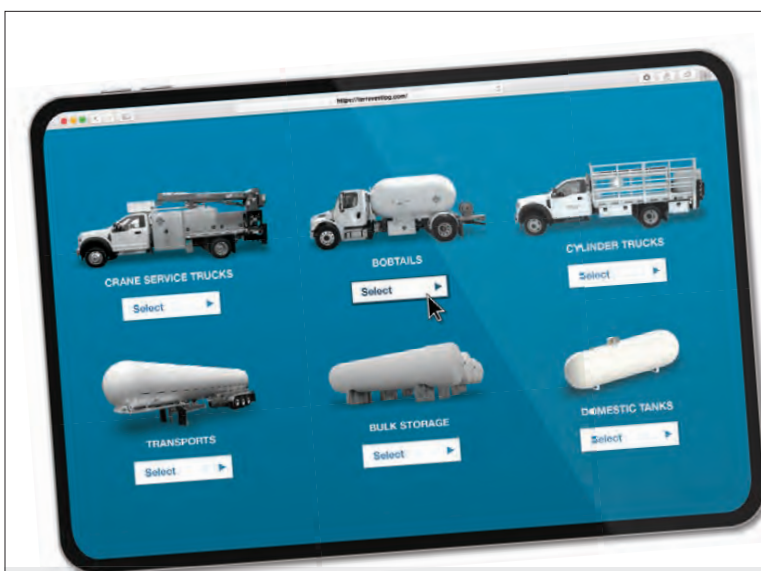
“Participants often tell us that the experience helps them become more effective communicators, stronger leaders and more successful team members. One of our goals is to continue growing the program so more propane professionals can benefit from it.”

Leaders also discussed opportunities to build additional learning experiences around DiSC and further integrate the program into broader leadership development initiatives.

GROWING THE KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

The retreat also focused on strengthening the Women in Propane Knowledge Exchange mentorship program, which connects industry professionals for mentorship, guidance and career development.

Board members explored strategies to increase participation, improve mentor and mentee matching and provide



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additional resources to support long-term success within the program.

“Mentorship is one of the most meaningful ways we can support the growth of professionals in our industry,” said Whitney O’Toole, immediate past chair. “The relationships built through the Knowledge Exchange program often extend well beyond the formal mentoring period. We discussed several exciting ideas that will help us expand participation and create even more opportunities for meaningful connections.”

Leaders agreed that mentorship plays a critical role in developing future propane industry leaders while helping preserve and share valuable industry knowledge.

RECOGNIZING OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP & SERVICE

The retreat also provided an opportunity to recognize two individuals whose leadership and dedication have helped Women in Propane grow and thrive.

Board members honored Whitney O’Toole for her service as chair and her lasting contributions to mentorship, professional development and member engagement, helping guide the organization through a period of continued growth.

Women in Propane also presented its inaugural Women in Propane MVP Award to Jennifer Jackson, recognizing her exceptional volunteerism and commitment to the organization. Through her leadership of the DISC program, support of fellow members and dedication to advancing key initiatives, Jackson has made a significant impact on Women in Propane. As Chair Mandy Swanson noted, “Jennifer represents the very best of Women in Propane. Her enthusiasm, leadership and dedication have helped move our organization forward in countless ways.”

The recognition highlighted the vital role volunteers play in strengthening the organization and advancing its mission.

LOOKING AHEAD

As the retreat concluded, participants left Arizona energized by the ideas generated and the momentum created through their conversations.

For Swanson, the retreat highlighted the passion and dedication that continues to define Women in Propane.

“What makes Women in Propane special is the willingness of people to share their time, experience and talents to help others succeed,” she said. “The strategy retreat reinforced that commitment and helped create a road map for continued growth and impact.”

With a clear vision and renewed enthusiasm, Women in Propane is well positioned to continue fostering leadership, professional development and meaningful connections throughout the propane industry. ▀



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ALL THINGS CONSIDERED: SALES, INSTALLATION, COSTS & MAINTENANCE OF AN UNDERGROUND TANK SYSTEM

Marketers can ensure a smooth process for customers by checking these important items off the list

BY CARL WEEKS

When it comes to propane tank installation, it's of vital importance for propane salespeople, company representatives, customers and contractors to plan and set their expectations prior to any installation, especially with underground ASME containers. Sales personnel should emphasize to the consumer that propane allows an opportunity to gain independence from the power grid and is both efficient and reliable.

They should discuss with customers their present energy situation and future appliances. (*Note:* The Propane Education & Research Council has brochures on propane containers, which should be distributed to the customer.) How will climate change impact your area, such as potential frequent electrical grid interruptions due to natural disasters like high winds, fires, floods and hurricanes? Is gas cogeneration and solar in their future?

How will electric companies prioritize customers in times of duress? Will they prioritize AI data centers, telecommunications, emergency response, hospitals, nursing homes, industrial and commercial accounts, or

the homeowner? These pre-installation conversations could promote a range of questions, such as adequate tank sizing, interior and exterior pipe sizing, and system components. If home heating with propane, what is the annual K-factor for the area and estimated annual usage? Are there plans for any home expansion or room additions? What about future swimming pools, sheds or structures that could cause tank placement issues?

Customers should understand that propane is an oil-based product, and price fluctuations are common. Explain your company's policy for price escalation and deescalation. Are there tank lease charges, delivery fees and environmental fees?

Does the customer prefer to be "automatic fill" or on a "will-call" delivery method? Who is going to monitor the tank percentage gauge? Today's fuel monitoring technology can go a long way in retaining satisfied customers, especially where there is incremental use, i.e., generators, pool and spa heating, planting, and year-round or seasonal accounts.

Why go underground? The customer should understand the advantages and

disadvantages. If property size is not an issue, an aboveground tank may be preferable. Is the home in a deed-restricted neighborhood that requires underground bulk tanks? Is there a homeowners' association that needs to be contacted and the installation preapproved?

A preliminary visit to the customer's location should be a company requirement so all parties are reading from the same page. To eliminate any misunderstandings and unhappy customers, a written tank and equipment lease agreement between the supplier and the customer is necessary.

State laws may dictate a change of supplier-written notifications and the consent of the homeowner. Is the lease and equipment agreement transferable? Unless affixed with a suitable locking mechanism, any inactive tank over 100-gallon water capacity requires pressure testing every 12 months. Predetermine who is going to bear this cost should the home be sold.

Though not always a wise decision, many customers may prefer to own their underground tank(s). In these cases, a predetermination as to maintenance costs, including piping, regulators and liability, should be agreed upon and understood in advance.

As most states enforce National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 58 and building codes, the latest requirements must be understood by all parties. Underground tank installations need on-site evaluation answering a few basic questions, like tank size and dimensions, vaporization rates, property excavation, tank setback codes (national and local) to buildings, property lines and sources of ignition.

Underground ASME tanks require periodic, documented cathodic protection inspection per NFPA 58 (2017) within 180 days of the installation and every three years thereafter. Who is responsible for conducting these inspections and maintaining records? Who pays?



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Before you dig, purchase and service orders should be documented and agreed upon by all parties, including, but not limited to, permit requirements and costs, possible tank tie-down engineering drawings (required from an authority having jurisdiction), and obtaining and line-locating other utilities.

Does the customer understand there will be excavation equipment on their property and inevitable landscape disturbance requiring sod replacement? Customers should consider how the heavy equipment and disturbance may impact neighbors' peace of mind and property.

Conduct an on-site evaluation to determine flood zones and flood potential, saltwater incursion, fertilizer and chemical saturation, and other corrosive considerations. Soil boring tests on commercial property should always be considered beforehand. What is the history of the property's use?

Underground propane leaks always follow the path of least resistance, so consideration must be made as to the proximity of sewer lines, septic tanks, drain fields and French drains, and the gas line's location. Underground gas line markers are mandatory and clean backfill is extremely important.

Of utmost importance is that the tank is 100% fully coated with no scratches or bare metal exposed. Anodes are properly sized and installed. Clean backfill can prevent any settlement issues.

Metallic or plastic company ID tags with the propane supplier's name and contact phone number are required. Decals on underground tanks are not sufficient.

Post-tank installation should include a walk-through with the customer to explain tank shut-off valves, data plate information, percentage gauge measurements, avoidance of chemical saturation around the tank, care and

emergency response criteria. Safety and duty-to-warn information must be provided to the consumer.

All gas check documents must be completed and signed by the company and consumer. ■

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



IF PROPANE BOILS OFF, WHY DOES A RETAILER NEED POLLUTION INSURANCE?

With the right coverage, propane retailers can address the financial risks of accidental releases, even when no long-term environmental contamination remains

BY DAN CRAMER

For retail propane companies, one question comes up repeatedly when pollution insurance is discussed: If propane is released, doesn't it simply vaporize and disappear?

The answer is generally yes — propane is highly volatile, and when liquid propane is released from a pressurized container into atmospheric conditions, it rapidly changes to a gas. Unlike many petroleum products, propane does not typically leave a persistent liquid residue in soil or water that remains for years.

That reality raises an important insurance question: If propane does not create the traditional long-term contamination problem associated with environmental pollution, why should a propane retailer consider pollution insurance as part of its coverage?

The answer requires looking beyond the word “pollution.” Pollution insurance is not necessarily about paying to excavate contaminated soil. For a propane retailer, the more important issue may be the financial consequences of an accidental release and the definition of a covered pollution condition under a particular insurance policy.

PROPANE'S BEHAVIOR DOES NOT ELIMINATE THE RISK

Propane's physical characteristics are an important part of understanding the exposure.

When released from pressure, liquid propane rapidly expands and vaporizes. Under normal circumstances, the gas disperses into the atmosphere rather than remaining as a persistent contaminant in soil or water.

That distinguishes propane from fuels and chemicals that can remain in the environment for extended periods.

But “it disappears” does not mean “nothing happened.”

A release can create an immediate hazardous condition. Propane vapor is highly flammable, and under certain circumstances it can accumulate in enclosed or poorly ventilated areas. A release can therefore result in evacuation, emergency response, fire department involvement, atmospheric monitoring, product recovery, ventilation or other response activities. Those costs can arise even if the propane ultimately dissipates and leaves no long-term environmental residue.

THE CLAIM MAY BE ABOUT THE RESPONSE — NOT ONLY THE RESIDUE

Imagine a bobtail making a routine delivery to a commercial customer. During the transfer, a connection fails, and propane is released. Employees and customers are evacuated. Emergency responders arrive. The area is secured, and specialists are brought in to determine whether propane vapor remains at hazardous concentrations.

Eventually, testing confirms that the propane has dissipated. There may be no contaminated soil to

excavate. There may be no contaminated groundwater to treat.

But there was still an incident. There may have been emergency response expenses, environmental consulting expenses, testing costs, legal expenses or claims from a third party alleging property damage or bodily injury.

This distinction is critical when evaluating pollution coverage. The absence of persistent contamination does not necessarily eliminate the financial consequences of a release.

WHAT ABOUT SOIL & WATER?

This is where propane retailers should be especially careful about how pollution coverage is described.

It would be misleading to suggest that every propane release will create a conventional soil or groundwater contamination claim. Propane's volatility makes that scenario fundamentally different from a spill involving a persistent liquid contaminant.

Likewise, simply saying that propane "pollutes water" can create the wrong impression. A propane release into water does not behave like an oil spill that leaves a long-lasting petroleum film.

Instead, the insurance discussion should focus on what happened, what was affected, what response was required and what liabilities resulted.

That may include circumstances where a release affects air quality, creates a hazardous atmosphere, triggers emergency response, impacts third-party property or requires investigation and specialized cleanup of materials associated with the incident.

The actual policy language matters enormously.

A POLLUTION POLICY IS NOT A PROPANE SAFETY POLICY

Another important point is that pollution insurance should not be viewed as protection against the inherent hazards of propane itself.

Retailers already purchase other forms of insurance that may address different parts of the exposure, including general liability, commercial auto, property,

workers' compensation and umbrella or excess liability coverage.

The question is whether those policies adequately respond to an environmental or pollution-related event. General liability policies frequently contain pollution exclusions or limitations. Some policies may provide limited exceptions for certain accidental releases, but the scope of those exceptions varies.

A pollution policy can potentially fill some of those gaps.

However, retailers should never assume that a policy covers a particular propane release simply because the policy is labeled "pollution liability." Coverage depends on the specific wording.

TRANSPORTATION MAKES THE QUESTION MORE IMPORTANT

Propane retailers are not simply storing a product behind a fence. They are transporting it.

Bobtails travel public roads. Employees deliver product to homes, farms, businesses and industrial facilities. Hoses are connected and disconnected hundreds or thousands of times. Equipment is loaded and unloaded. Service personnel work on customer property. That mobility creates an unusual insurance exposure.

Consider a vehicle accident involving a propane delivery truck. The incident might require emergency responders, traffic control, product recovery, atmospheric testing, specialized contractors and other expenses.

The propane itself may ultimately dissipate. Nevertheless, the incident can produce substantial costs.

The retailer should therefore determine whether its commercial auto, general liability, pollution liability and umbrella policies work together to address this type of event.

THIRD-PARTY CLAIMS MAY BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN CLEANUP

For many propane retailers, the most compelling reason to examine pollution coverage may not be environmental remediation at all.

It may be third-party liability.

A release could occur at a customer's property and result in an evacuation. A neighboring business might allege that its operations were interrupted. A property owner could claim that specialized cleanup was necessary. A release inside a building could result in allegations of bodily injury or property damage.

Whether such claims are covered is a matter of policy language and facts.

The point is that an environmental liability claim does not necessarily begin with a contaminated field. It can begin with a phone call from a customer saying, "Your delivery caused us to evacuate our building."

THE RIGHT QUESTION FOR PROPANE RETAILERS

Rather than asking, "Does propane contaminate soil?" retailers should ask a broader insurance question:

"Where could a release occur, what could it affect and which policy would respond?"

That analysis should include the bulk plant, delivery vehicles, loading and unloading operations, customer locations, storage tanks, transfer equipment, service operations and contractors. Retailers should then examine how their existing policies address accidental releases.

- Are pollution exclusions present?
- Is transportation pollution addressed?
- Are emergency response expenses adequately covered?
- What happens if a release occurs on a customer's property?
- What happens if a claim involves vapor, air, water or third-party property instead of contaminated soil?
- Are defense costs included within the policy limit? Are known conditions excluded?
- Are there coverage requirements or reporting provisions that could affect a claim?

These questions are more useful than simply asking whether propane leaves a residue.

POLLUTION INSURANCE MAY BE A GAP-FILLING DECISION

Ultimately, the decision to purchase pollution insurance is a risk-management decision — not an admission that propane routinely creates long-term environmental contamination.

A retailer may reasonably conclude that its existing insurance program provides adequate protection. Another retailer may determine that the potential gap is too significant to leave uninsured.

The important thing to remember is to make that decision based on the actual policy language and the retailer's operations. Propane's rapid vaporization is certainly relevant. It may reduce the likelihood of certain types of long-term contamination claims. But it does not make an accidental release financially inconsequential.

The product can disappear while the claim remains. That is perhaps the most

useful way for a propane retailer to think about pollution insurance.

The environmental residue may be temporary or nonexistent. The emergency response may last hours or days. The investigation may continue longer. Third-party allegations may take months to resolve. Legal expenses can continue even when testing shows that no persistent contamination remains.

Pollution insurance, where appropriately designed, can provide another layer of protection for those types of exposures. For propane retailers, therefore, the question should not simply be whether propane contaminates soil or water. The better question is whether the company's insurance program is prepared for the financial consequences of an accidental release — even when the propane itself is long gone.

As always, retailers should review the actual terms, conditions, exclusions, definitions and endorsements of their

policies with qualified insurance and legal professionals before concluding that a particular incident is covered. ▀

Dan Cramer is a partner at First West Insurance in Bozeman, Montana. He works closely with clients to help them navigate the regulatory, operational and insurance complexities associated with their business. His approach is centered on understanding how each client operates, identifying potential exposures and developing comprehensive insurance and risk reduction programs that provide meaningful protection while supporting long-term business objectives. Cramer's primary areas of expertise include large commercial auto fleets and heavy truck-tractor operations, with a particular focus on the propane industry. He began his career in 2005 with Wells Fargo Insurance Services before moving to Lovitt & Touche in Phoenix, Arizona, and then owning Cramer Insurance Agency in Denver, Colorado — eventually moving back to Montana for his role with First West Insurance.



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'PROPANE & THE LAW' SPECIAL EDITION:

SOUTH CAROLINA TANK-TOP HEATER LITIGATION CONTINUES

The case hinges on whether adequate warnings defeat a product defect claim under state law

BY DAVID SCHLEE

A tragic 2022 death has spawned continuing litigation regarding the design of a Mr. Heater-brand propane tank-top heater. A South Carolina federal court granted summary judgment in favor of the heater's manufacturer, and the plaintiff appealed. On July 17, a federal appeals court deferred a ruling on whether the summary judgment should be affirmed and asked the South Carolina Supreme Court to first clarify an issue under South Carolina law. So, a final ruling is unlikely until at least next year. The case is *Near v. Enerco Group Inc.*

WORKSHOP & HEATER

The story behind the case begins in the workshop of Douglas Belger. There, in December 2022, Belger and his nephew Keith McCullough were repairing Belger's broken mailbox. The two were best friends and spent a lot of time together in the workshop fixing things and generally tinkering.

It was an unusually cold December day (water lines in the building had frozen), and so McCullough brought in a portable propane tank-top heater to keep them warm while they worked. The heater was a Model MH15T marketed under

the name "Mr. Heater." It was designed, manufactured and marketed by Enerco Group Inc. (See Picture 1 of a similar heater taken from the court decision.)

Many in the industry are familiar with this type of portable heater, which has been on the market in one form or another for the past 40 years or more. It is attached to the valve outlet of a small cylinder, almost always 20 pounds or fewer. Propane passes through a regulator and is ignited by a small burner. The burner flame is directed across a metal mesh or ceramic surface that becomes very hot (usually glowing red or orange).



Depiction of a portable tank-top heater (image pulled from LexisNexis)

CLOTHING IN FLAMES

As they worked in Belger's shop, both men would periodically stand near the heater to warm themselves. According to the court decision, Belger was wearing "a plaid brown shirt, long john undershirt, a jacket that was 100% cotton and pants that were a blend of 60% cotton, 36% nylon and 4% elastane." At some point, McCullough went outside to gather wood, wanting to demonstrate a new wood splitter he had put together. He was gone no more than 45 seconds.

As he walked back toward the shop, Belger came running out with his clothing in flames. While he did not see what happened, McCullough speculated that Belger "inadvertently got close, fell or backed into the heater," which ignited his clothing. Belger sustained burn injuries over 13% of his body. He underwent surgical debridement and grafting but died while in recovery.

Jesse Near, a representative of Belger's estate, filed a wrongful-death product liability lawsuit against Enerco in federal court. He claimed the design of the heater was defective because it lacked an adequate guard or other feasible alternative design that would have prevented clothing from igniting when a user came too close to the heater. He did not assert a separate failure-to-warn or warnings defect claim.

ADEQUATE WARNINGS?

However, the heater's warnings were

central to Enerco's defense. It argued the warnings accompanying the heater, if adequate, rendered the product nondefective under South Carolina law. It moved to disqualify Near's expert on warnings, and it sought summary judgment in its favor. Near did not agree with Enerco's interpretation of South Carolina law and moved to certify to the Supreme Court of South Carolina the question of whether adequate warnings preclude a design defect claim. (Federal courts must apply state law in cases like this. If the state law is unclear, the state supreme court can be asked to clarify it.)

The trial court ruled in Enerco's favor across the board. First, it disqualified Near's expert on warnings. It noted that Enerco "sells these heaters with numerous warnings and instructions," and that these are displayed "on a hangtag attached to the heaters, on their packaging and in the Operating Instructions and Owner's Manual that accompanies the heaters." It found that while the expert claimed these warnings were inadequate, she offered no explanation of the basis for this conclusion and "offers no alternatives." It added that she did not use a "reliable methodology" and that her opinions were based on her own "say so" without supporting evidence or proof.

FAILURE TO OFFER EVIDENCE

The court then addressed Enerco's motion for summary judgment. It agreed that South Carolina law was clear: adequate warnings on a product defeat a design defect claim. So, it refused to ask the South Carolina Supreme Court to address the question. And it found that, since his expert was disqualified, Near failed to show that the warnings on the Mr. Heater were inadequate:

"South Carolina law allows adequate product warnings to 'cure' alleged design defects. Thus, the court need not address whether a design defect existed in this case, as plaintiff has failed to offer admissible evidence, whether through expert testimony or otherwise, challenging the adequacy of the product warnings.

Furthermore, plaintiff's own experts concede that, had [Belger] followed the warnings provided, the tragic accident in which his clothing caught fire would not have occurred."

APPEAL & CERTIFICATION

Near appealed to the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, based in Richmond, Virginia. The appellate court first addressed the question of whether the South Carolina Supreme Court should be consulted on the central legal issue in the case — whether adequate warnings on a product defeat a claim that the product was improperly designed. It held that it should be consulted:

"[W]e respectfully certify the following question of law to the Supreme Court of South Carolina: Do adequate warnings preclude a design defect claim as a matter of South Carolina law?"

Next, the court took up the disqualification of Near's expert on warnings. On this point, it affirmed the trial court's ruling:

"Here, the district court reasonably concluded that [the expert] did not connect her theory to objective evidence. In reaching that conclusion, the court did not rely on one methodological omission in isolation. It identified several gaps showing that [the expert] did not reliably tie her general human factors principles to this specific case."

Since the court asked the South Carolina Supreme Court for a ruling on the central legal issue in the case, the appellate court deferred a decision on Enerco's summary judgment motion until that ruling is received. 📌

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.





WLGA & IEA HOST LPG LEADERSHIP FORUM

The forum discussed LPG supply resilience in a high-risk world

BY JAMES ROCKALL

PHOTOS COURTESY OF IEA

On June 26, the World Liquid Gas Association (WLGA) and the International Energy Agency (IEA) jointly hosted the inaugural LPG Leadership Forum at the IEA headquarters in Paris.

The forum convened the IEA, more than 80 senior liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) industry leaders, international organizations including NATO, and representatives from some 17 governments around the world, providing a unique opportunity for engagement in open and constructive dialogue. The gathering took place against a backdrop of heightened geopolitical uncertainty, including ongoing instability in the Middle East that has placed new pressure on global energy supply routes, lending the discussions a particular sense of urgency and relevance.

The forum marks an important and pivotal milestone in the relationship between the global LPG industry and the IEA, reflecting the growing recognition of LPG's critical role in strengthening energy security, improving resilience and expanding access to clean cooking around the world. This also builds on the momentum from the first Summit on Clean Cooking in Africa in 2024, where LPG was recognized as a major contributor to the global energy mix.

The forum also builds on a deepening partnership between the WLGA and the IEA, which has included ministerial-level talks on energy access and clean cooking hosted in Paris earlier in 2026. Taken together, these engagements underline a shared conviction that energy security and clean cooking access are closely linked challenges, both of which require sustained collaboration between governments, international institutions and industry.

As managing director and CEO of the WLGA, I welcomed the participants, and Dr. Fatih Birol, IEA executive director, and Donal Murphy, CEO of DCC Energy and WLGA president, started discussions with their opening remarks. All three speeches set the tone for the day, framing LPG's role within the wider energy security agenda, underlining the IEA's growing focus on the resilience of LPG supply chains and reaffirming the industry's readiness to invest in the infrastructure and partnerships needed to keep supply flowing to the households, businesses and communities that depend on it.

The combination of strategic presentations, industry perspectives and interactive debate throughout the day encouraged a frank exchange of ideas and highlighted the value of bringing together stakeholders from different regions and markets. Delegates emphasized the importance of maintaining regular dialogue as the pace of policy and market developments continues to accelerate. Several noted this was the first time such a broad cross-section of governments, multilateral institutions and industry had come together specifically to examine LPG supply resilience and called for the dialogue to become a recurring fixture on the international energy calendar.

Discussions focused on the critical importance of strategic LPG storage and reserve mechanisms, the protection of critical infrastructure, supply diversification and strengthening national energy resilience, particularly for developing economies and import-dependent markets in Africa. Speakers explored practical measures such as expanding strategic and commercial storage capacity; diversifying import routes and supplier bases; safeguarding ports, terminals and distribution networks from disruption; and building stronger regional



cooperation so countries can support one another during periods of market stress.

Participants recognized the vital role LPG plays in supporting energy security as the primary cooking fuel for 3.4 billion people across developing economies, and the scale of what remains at stake: Continued reliance on solid fuels and open fires for cooking is linked to hundreds of thousands of premature deaths every year, disproportionately affecting women and children. They also focused on the importance of closer collaboration between governments and industry to improve the resilience of global supply chains and reduce the risks posed by future disruptions.

The discussions informed ongoing international efforts to strengthen energy resilience, including through a Clean Cooking Security Programme, hosted by the IEA, to identify the policies, investments and partnerships needed to strengthen the resilience of global LPG supply chains. Several governments and private sector representatives expressed their intention to join the task force, with a high-level virtual session held on July 9 to review progress and announce new financial and policy commitments ahead

of the second Summit on Clean Cooking in Africa, held in Nairobi, Kenya.

The event reinforced the importance of the industry not only working closely together but also working closely with key stakeholders such as the IEA. LPG indeed has an essential and unique role, and while supply must be reliable, we can demonstrate resilience on many levels, including flexibility in distribution, strong local infrastructure and enhanced storage. In practice, this means continued investment in bottling and distribution infrastructure, diversified shipping and supply arrangements, and closer coordination between the public and private sectors so that disruption in one market can be absorbed without leaving vulnerable communities without fuel. LPG is acknowledged as a practical solution capable of delivering immediate emissions reductions while supporting longer-term energy transition objectives, offering a rare combination of energy security, affordability and lower-carbon performance compared with the solid fuels it so often replaces.

This event reinforced the WLGA's role as a trusted global voice for the liquid gas industry. By uniting senior decision-

makers and facilitating evidence-based discussion, the WLGA continues to demonstrate leadership in promoting the industry's contribution to a secure, resilient and sustainable energy future. It also reflects the association's broader mission of connecting national and regional LPG associations, producers, distributors and equipment manufacturers around the world and of ensuring that industry expertise is heard directly by the policymakers and institutions shaping the future of the global energy system.

Overall, the Leadership Forum achieved its objectives of strengthening engagement, encouraging strategic dialogue and reinforcing the importance of LPG within the global energy transition. The insights and relationships developed during the event will help inform future advocacy, technical collaboration and member activities, ensuring the industry remains well positioned to contribute to the evolving global energy agenda. The WLGA intends to work with the IEA and forum participants to translate the discussions into concrete next steps, including continued input into the Clean Cooking



continued engagement with the industry as it works to expand reliable and affordable energy access around the world. ▀

James Rockall is the CEO and managing director of WLGA. Based in Paris, he has full responsibility for legal, financial, operational, strategic, governance and performance-related aspects of the organization, with over 300 clients operating in more than 125 countries around the world. Rockall has 30 years of global experience in the energy sector. He has a strong energy and business development background, having worked for Shell International in senior management positions in the Netherlands and Venezuela. Prior to joining WLGA, Rockall worked as a director of the global energy group ALSTOM SA. He is a Fellow of the UK Institution of Chemical Engineers with a master's degree with honors from the University of Nottingham in the UK and an MBA from the Institute of Management Development in Lausanne, Switzerland. Visit worldliquidgas.org.



Security Programme and further opportunities for governments and industry to compare notes on storage, infrastructure and supply diversification.

The WLGA extends a sincere thank you to the IEA for its partnership and hospitality. We look forward to productive discussions that will help shape the future of LPG in the global energy transition. We also look forward to continuing these critical discussions to maintain momentum during Liquid Gas

Week, which will take place in Istanbul from Oct. 12-16.

Set to be the largest gathering ever held for the liquid gas industry, and taking place in a city that connects Europe, Asia and the Middle East, Liquid Gas Week will bring producers, distributors, innovators and regulators together to build on the resilience agenda established at the Leadership Forum. Dr. Birol will return to deliver a keynote address, underscoring the IEA's



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PROPANE AUTOGAS GRANTS: SHORT-TERM & LONG-TERM ASSESSMENT

NPGA's grants manager evaluates the FTA's recent reopening of grant funding, calls attention to future funding opportunities

BY JOHNNY NICKEL

In August, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) reopened applications for the agency's Low or No Emissions Program and bus grant funding. Applications were due Sept. 21.

To get a better understanding of the incentive to reopen this funding, as well as the impact these kinds of opportunities have on the propane autogas industry, BPN spoke with Nicholas Edward, grants and agency engagement manager at the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA). Ahead, Edward shares his insights.

BPN: Can you explain the recent reopening of 2026 applications for the FTA's Low-No Program and bus infrastructure grants? What led to reopening this funding?

Edward: The 2026 notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) for the Low and No Emissions Program (Low-No) and Buses and Bus Facilities Program are, in part, reflective of 2025's extensive number of applications. The FTA selected 165 projects for funding, totaling about \$2.03 billion in 2025. Then in February 2026, Congress allocated roughly \$1 billion

for the year. Rather than immediately opening the NOFO for each program soon thereafter, the FTA reallocated 2026's funding to support programs from the 2025 application cycle, roughly \$390 million of the bus program's budget to fund 34 additional projects; that's why the Buses program is significantly reduced this cycle.

Additionally, 2026 is the second year that the Trump administration has had the opportunity to influence grant funding. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy has made a significant effort to reprioritize low-emission projects over zero-emission projects to the maximum extent permitted by law after four years of intensive funding for nonfossil-fuel projects and climate initiatives during the Biden administration.

That matters for the industry as the current NOFO expressly lists propane as a propulsion option, and the application criteria give applicants an opportunity to compete under the administration's revised priorities. Electric buses and their infrastructure will now not be given priority over low-emission fuel alternatives — which will save applicants millions of dollars, putting more buses with more reliable fueling options on the road quicker than ever.

How do the two funding programs differ? Who could apply for each?

Both programs are open to applications from designated recipients, states, local government entities and federally recognized tribes with special eligibility to private nonprofit organizations engaged in public transportation to participate as subrecipients of a public entity. Unlike other opportunities, the Low-No and Buses programs must support general public transportation projects, rather than school buses or other limited-use cases.

The two programs overlap, but they have different purposes and eligibility rules. The Low-No program specifically funds the purchase or lease of low- and zero-emission transit buses and the facilities and equipment needed to support them. The Buses and Bus

Facilities Program is broader; it can fund the purchase, lease or rehabilitation of buses regardless of propulsion or emissions, as well as related equipment and bus facilities. For propane specifically, Low-No is the more targeted opportunity, because the FTA expressly classifies propane buses as eligible low-emission buses and at least 25% of Low-No awards must go to nonzero-emission projects.

Are there other funding programs propane and autogas distributors should keep an eye on for the rest of 2026 and moving forward into 2027?

Things are going to be very theoretical until after the midterm elections this November, and Congress can't predict the landscape for 2027's budget battles. Many of the current funding opportunities for transportation and infrastructure stem from the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which were continued through 2025 and 2026, and they enjoy wide support from municipalities, states and organizations alike.

Propane as a fuel and trade commodity is very well situated to mesh with the administration's goals of boosting domestic economic security, increasing exports and reorganizing public spending away from environmental justice projects with huge price tags. Grants are going to continue to support public infrastructure and municipal progress for the next few years at least.

The Department of Transportation definitely has the largest cadre of funding opportunities that benefits propane. Five grants — Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation; Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success; Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development; Hazardous Materials, Pipeline Safety and Damage Prevention; and the Port Infrastructure Development Program — represent billions of dollars in funding that have proven award records supporting public, private and nonprofit propane-related projects. Like most opportunities, it's best to start preparing an application as soon as possible in

order to maximize time and energy, even if there's no word on when these opportunities will open in 2027.

Provided the agency continues to receive funding stemming from IIJA authorizations, the Environmental Protection Agency's Diesel Emissions Reduction Act, Clean School Bus Program, Pollution Prevention Grant Program and research opportunities will all be boons to the propane industry for governmental and private entities alike.

Likewise, the Department of Energy (DOE) has a significant impact across various programs. In 2025 and 2026, DOE supported \$50 million for energy security among Native American tribes (who utilize propane for off-grid electricity and heating), billions of dollars in NOFOs to support the energy and minerals supply chain through new technology, and expansion of operations and reprioritization of energy transmission for the data center market, which is expanding at a breakneck pace across the country using a variety of diesel, natural gas and propane backup generators when the electrical grid runs short of juice.

What are the top selling points autogas distributors should be making to bus fleets and other end users when it comes to these funding opportunities?

Autogas distributors should emphasize that propane is explicitly eligible as a low-emission technology under Low-No, and FTA intends to prioritize low-emission projects over zero-emission projects to the maximum extent permitted by law. Distributors should demonstrate how propane can provide lower emissions, competitive acquisition and operating costs, reliable fueling and rapid deployment without requiring fleets to completely overhaul their operations.

They can also strengthen applications by serving as credible project partners that provide fuel-supply plans, infrastructure solutions, cost estimates, implementation schedules and technical support. Most importantly, the pitch should connect these advantages to FTA's priorities: cost-effective modernization,



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reliable transit service and tangible benefits for families and communities.

How have propane products and transit projects fared in being accepted for these programs compared to other alternative fuel options?

Historically, propane has been eligible and successful, but it has represented a smaller share of Low-No and Buses awards than battery-electric and other alternative-fuel technologies, particularly during the recent federal emphasis on zero-emission transit. Nevertheless, FTA has repeatedly funded propane projects — for example, propane buses and fueling infrastructure in South Dakota in 2022; the Seminole Nation in 2023; Florida, Kansas, Mississippi and Minnesota in 2024; and multiple propane projects in Michigan, Minnesota and Tennessee in 2025, among others.

The outlook is stronger for 2026 because FTA explicitly identifies propane as an eligible low-emission technology and states that it intends to prioritize low-emission projects. Propane is a remarkably cheap fuel for fleet vehicles with easy retrofitting procedures, and data to support that fact will be the industry's biggest advantage over others.

Is there anything propane distributors should encourage transit agencies to include in their applications to help boost their chances of funding?

Distributors should encourage applicants to quantify propane's benefits with project-specific evidence — emissions and energy reductions, acquisition and operating costs, maintenance savings, reliability and comparisons with conventional and other low- or no-emission buses.

They should also help agencies demonstrate implementation readiness, including firm vehicle and fueling-infrastructure pricing, committed matching funds, realistic schedules, reliable fuel supply and qualified project partners.

Importantly, the absence of propane vehicles from an applicant's state purchasing schedule does not itself prevent an agency or municipality from using an FTA award for an eligible propane project. Applicants should consider requesting only the incremental cost of the low-emission technology, which the FTA identifies as a favorable consideration, while clearly connecting the project to reliable service and benefits for families and communities.

How has the funding landscape changed in recent years, months, etc.? Are there more or less funding opportunities available for the propane sector?

The funding landscape has shifted noticeably: In the early 2020s, several major federal programs were designed specifically around zero-emission vehicles, which limited propane's ability to compete even when it could deliver significant emissions reductions. For example, EPA's \$1 billion Clean Heavy-Duty Vehicles Program was restricted to zero-emission replacements.

In 2026, however, federal transportation policy has shifted toward technology-neutral policies or policies explicitly favoring low-emission fuels. That creates a favorable competitive environment for propane in certain programs. Overall, I would characterize 2026–2027 as a potentially improving funding environment for propane, with the key opportunity being to identify programs where cost, reliability, emissions reductions and technology choice are replacing zero-emission status as the primary policy test.

What role does NPGA play in securing and making these kinds of grants accessible to propane and its partners?

NPGA is playing an increasingly active role in making federal and state grant funding accessible to the propane industry by identifying opportunities, monitoring changing award criteria, advocating for technology-neutral treatment of fuel sources and providing grant-development assistance. It has also invested in tools to track thousands of live grant opportunities from local, state, federal and private organizations.

NPGA is working with industry members and supporters to directly prepare and strengthen grant applications designed to secure funding for propane vehicles, infrastructure, safety and other projects such as workforce training and education while helping applicants navigate eligibility and program requirements.

At the same time, NPGA is building partnerships at the municipal and

state levels, connecting the propane industry with transit agencies, local governments, state and regional associations, emergency responders and other potential grant partners. The goal is not simply to alert the industry when funding becomes available, but to help develop viable projects and partnerships and carry them through the application process to strengthen the industry, the American workforce and the nation.

Is there anything else you'd like to share with BPN's readers?

Advocacy remains essential to ensuring policymakers recognize propane as a viable, reliable fuel for transportation, residential and commercial heating, power generation and U.S. energy exports, rather than allowing narrow-minded policy to prematurely eliminate fuel choices. This is particularly important at the state and local levels, where electrification mandates and restrictions on combustion technologies continue to threaten propane's access to key markets, putting communities at risk.

NPGA reports monitoring such efforts in more than 260 local jurisdictions across 36 states, while 28 states have enacted energy-choice protections. The industry should continue making the case for technology-neutral policies that evaluate fuels on affordability, reliability, emissions, energy security and real-world performance, while demonstrating propane's value as a transportation fuel and dispatchable, on-site energy resource.

Continued engagement by propane businesses with lawmakers, regulators, municipalities and customers will be critical to ensuring that propane remains part of America's diverse domestic energy portfolio and an important energy commodity in global markets. ■

Johnny Nickel is managing editor of Butane-Propane News.

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WHAT THE 2026 PROPANE SURVEY SAYS ABOUT WHERE THE INDUSTRY IS HEADED

5 key takeaways propane distributors should stay on top of

BY MARTY KIRSHNER

CHARTS COURTESY OF GRAY, GRAY & GRAY – A FRAZIER & DEETER COMPANY

Gray, Gray & Gray’s annual Propane Industry Survey always provides a wealth of information on operations, finances and how dealers manage their businesses. But you have to read between the lines a bit to spot the emerging trends that will shape our industry in the years ahead. Let’s take a deeper dive into the results from the most recent survey.

RAPID INCORPORATION OF AI

The single number that jumps off the page in our 2026 National Propane Industry Survey is 65. That’s the percentage of propane dealers who now say they’ve incorporated artificial intelligence into their operations, up from just 19% a year earlier. A 46-point swing in 12 months is not a gradual shift. It’s a whole industry deciding — seemingly all at once — that AI has stopped being a conference-panel topic and has become a tool for route optimization, tank-monitoring analytics and customer service automation. Dealers are using it primarily for run-

out prevention (32%) and dispatch planning (27%), which suggests this isn’t about chatbots for their own sake. It’s about squeezing more efficiency out of a delivery network that has gotten steadily leaner over the past several years.

That leanness shows up in another number worth examining: According to data from Angus Energy, gallons delivered per stop climbed from 160 in 2023 to 182 in 2024, then 206 in 2025, and now 218 in 2026. Over the past four years of our survey, dealers have talked about making fewer, larger deliveries and optimizing fleet routing, and every year the data backs it up. This is the quiet story underneath the AI headline. Long before software vendors started pitching predictive analytics, propane marketers were already engineering their routes for maximum

Only 1% of dealers reported declining profitability, & 66% grew their per-gallon margin. That’s a resilient result for a year with genuine supply uncertainty.

gallons per stop, and the technology adoption of the past year looks less like a leap and more like dealers finally getting tools that match a strategy they’d already committed to.

RESILIENT MARGINS AMONG UNCERTAINTY

Margins tell a slightly different story this year. Residential propane margins rose steadily for three straight years, from \$1.30 a gallon in 2023 to \$1.42 in 2024 to \$1.50 in 2025, before slipping just slightly to \$1.48 in 2026. Commercial margins tell a similar story, holding flat at \$0.87 through 2023 and 2024, then jumping to \$1.01 in 2025 before easing back to \$0.98 in 2026. This year points to global disruption in product supply late in the season — a modest pullback after three years of gains that looks less like trouble and more like an industry absorbing a real shock without losing ground. Only 1% of dealers reported declining

What is Your Company’s Average Gallons Delivered per Stop?			
	2026	2025	2024
Avg. propane gallons per stop	218	206	182
Stops per hour	1.7	1.7	1.9
Gallons delivered per hour	375	359	346

Propane companies average gallons delivered per stop, 2024-2026.

profitability, and 66% grew their per-gallon margin. That's a resilient result for a year with genuine supply uncertainty.

SHIFTING WORKFORCE STRATEGIES

Labor remains the one constant across all four years of this survey, though the shape of the problem is shifting. In 2023, 61% of dealers reported one to five vacant positions. That figure has eased each year since, down to 47% in 2026, with 28% now reporting no vacancies at all. Recruiting and retention still top the list of challenges dealers report, at 57%, but the industry's playbook for holding onto people has matured. Wage increases remain the most common retention tool, and 77% of dealers now say they're cross-training employees specifically to keep them working year-round instead of laying them off in the offseason. The problem hasn't disappeared, but dealers have gotten better at managing it.

CONVERTING TO ELECTRIC HEAT PUMPS — & BACK AGAIN

The trend that deserves more attention than it's getting is what's happening on the demand side. The share of dealers who lost customers to heat pump conversions jumped from 11% in 2025 to 18% in 2026, one of the largest single-year moves in the customer-loss data over the past four years. But the same survey asked a new question this year about what happened to those converts, and the answers are worth reading closely: 37% reported inadequate heating performance, 36% reported higher energy bills and 22% of converted customers reverted to legacy systems. That's not an argument for complacency. It's a specific, current talking point for any dealer fielding a "why not just switch to electric" conversation with a customer this fall.

INCREASED CONSOLIDATION

Finally, watch the ownership data. The share of dealers considering selling their business more than doubled this year, from 9% in 2025 to 19% in 2026, while acquisition appetite climbed back to 49%, up from 39% in 2025 and roughly

Biggest Change for Employee Retention in Current Year That You Have Not Done Previously		
	2026	2025
Wage and salary increases	33%	54%
Flexible work schedules	21%	8%
Employee training and cross-training	10%	7%
Deferred compensation	3%	1%
Bonuses	13%	10%
Additional paid time off	4%	3%
Other	7%	11%
OTHER Responses:		
• Improved and/or additional insurance options		
• Increased 401k match		

Newly enacted workforce retention strategies, 2025-2026.

back to its 2023 level. Combined with succession planning holding steady at around half of respondents, this suggests an industry entering an even more active consolidation phase. Meanwhile, 40% of dealers say they spend less than 2% of gross margin on marketing, even as price competition remains the top reason customers leave. In a market where bigger players are shopping for acquisitions and smaller ones are shopping for exits, underinvesting in the

customer relationships that determine which category you fall into seems like the riskiest number in the whole survey. ▮

Marty Kirshner, CPA, MSA, is the partner who leads the Energy Practice Group at Gray, Gray & Gray – A Frazier & Deeter Company, an accounting and advisory firm that serves the propane industry. Visit gggllp.com.



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SMALL STEPS, BIG IMPACT — HOW TO FOSTER INCREMENTAL INNOVATION AT WORK

8 steps to implement long-term change in the workplace

BY KATE ZABRISKIE

When people hear the word “innovation,” they often think of groundbreaking products, disruptive technologies or revolutionary ideas. But not every improvement needs to reinvent the wheel. Small changes may seem insignificant at first, but their cumulative effect can be transformative:

- **Improved efficiency:** Tiny adjustments to workflows can save hours of time over weeks and months.
- **Higher employee engagement:** When employees feel empowered to innovate, they take greater ownership of their work.
- **A culture of continuous improvement:** Incremental innovation keeps teams focused on progress, even during challenging times.

Fostering incremental innovation doesn't require large budgets or dramatic overhauls. Instead, it's about building a culture that values and encourages small, meaningful changes. Here's how to create an environment where these improvements become part of your team's everyday mindset.

STEP 1: REDEFINE INNOVATION

The first step is to shift the mindset around what innovation means. Many employees shy away from suggesting improvements because they assume their ideas need to be groundbreaking to be worth sharing.

💡 Practical Tips

- **Highlight examples:** Share success stories of small changes that made a big difference — for example, a minor adjustment to a scheduling system that saved hours each week.
- **Reframe the goal:** Emphasize that innovation can be as simple as finding a faster way to complete a task or improving customer response times.

STEP 2: MAKE TIME FOR REFLECTION

Day-to-day busyness often prevents teams from stepping back to evaluate what could be better. Creating dedicated time for reflection helps uncover areas ripe for improvement.

💡 Practical Tips

- **Hold regular improvement meetings:** Schedule short, recurring sessions where team members can discuss what's working, what's not and what small changes could help.
- **Use questions to spark ideas:** Ask things like, “What's one step in our process that feels slower than it should?” or “What task would you love to automate or simplify?”

STEP 3: EMPOWER EMPLOYEES TO EXPERIMENT

To encourage incremental innovation, employees need the freedom to try new things without fear of failure. Small

experiments allow teams to test ideas with minimal risk.

💡 Practical Tips

- **Give permission to test:** Create a pilot phase for small changes. For example, if someone wants to try a new workflow, allow them to test it with a single project or team before rolling it out more broadly.
- **Remove red tape:** Simplify the approval process for low-stakes changes so employees can act on ideas quickly.

STEP 4: RECOGNIZE & CELEBRATE PROGRESS

Recognition is a powerful motivator. When employees see their incremental improvements are noticed and valued, they'll be more likely to keep innovating.

💡 Practical Tips

- **Share success stories:** Highlight small wins in team meetings, newsletters or company updates.
- **Create an innovation wall:** Dedicate a space (physical or virtual) where employees can showcase their ideas and the results they've achieved.
- **Offer rewards:** Even simple acknowledgments, like gift cards or shoutouts, can go a long way in reinforcing a culture of continuous improvement.

STEP 5: PROVIDE TOOLS & TRAINING

Employees may want to contribute innovative ideas but lack the tools or knowledge to act on them. Offering resources to help them learn and experiment can make all the difference.

💡 Practical Tips

- **Offer training:** Host workshops on problem-solving, process improvement or creative thinking techniques.
- **Introduce collaborative tools:** Platforms like Miro or Trello can help teams brainstorm and track ideas for incremental changes.
- **Provide data access:** Equip employees with the metrics they need to identify inefficiencies or measure the impact of their ideas.

STEP 6: CREATE FEEDBACK LOOPS

Innovation doesn't happen in isolation. Feedback is essential for refining ideas and ensuring small changes lead to meaningful improvements.

💡 Practical Tips

- **Establish a feedback culture:** Encourage team members to regularly share input on each other's ideas, focusing on constructive suggestions.
- **Track results:** After implementing a change, review its impact and discuss what worked, what didn't and what could be improved further.

STEP 7: START WITH QUICK WINS

Quick wins — simple changes with immediate benefits — build momentum and show employees that incremental innovation is both achievable and impactful.

💡 Practical Tips

- **Identify pain points:** "What's one small change that would improve your day?"
- **Prioritize simplicity:** Focus on ideas that can be implemented quickly without major disruptions.

STEP 8: LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Leaders play a critical role in fostering incremental innovation. If employees see their managers embracing and acting on small improvements, they'll feel encouraged to do the same.

💡 Practical Tips

- **Model continuous improvement:** Share the small changes you're making to your own work processes.
- **Be open to feedback:** Actively solicit input from your team on how you can improve your leadership or workflows.

TAKE ACTION

Revolutionary ideas might grab headlines,

but incremental innovation is what keeps organizations moving forward.

What's one small change you or your team can make today? Look for those overlooked opportunities — the inefficient process, the recurring frustration or the task that could be simplified. Act on them. One small step may seem insignificant, but together, those steps can transform your workplace in extraordinary ways. 📌

Kate Zabriskie is the president of Business Training Works Inc., a Virginia-based talent development firm. She and her team provide on-site, virtual and online soft-skills training courses and workshops to clients in the United States and internationally. For more information, visit businesstrainingworks.com.



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STEADY IN THE STORM: MANAGING FINANCIAL RISK IN UNCERTAIN ECONOMIC TIMES

Establishing an acceptable forecasting range aids in planning for a variety of case scenarios

BY SCOOTER THOMAS

MUBASHAR - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Propane marketers have always built their businesses around things they cannot control. Weather. Wholesale price swings. A season that decides whether the whole year works.

What has changed is the cost of money. Rate uncertainty now sits alongside those older variables, and it reaches further into the business than owners tend to expect: the note on the new bobtail, the line of credit that funds prebuy, the terms on a storage addition that looked routine two years ago.

I work with business owners on questions like these, and a useful habit is to plan around a range rather than a single forecast.

FROM A SINGLE NUMBER TO A RANGE

Nearly every marketer forecasts price. That is table stakes, and the forecast drives cost of goods sold right down to the margin line.

The more useful question comes after: How wrong can the forecast be before being wrong actually costs you something? Before it reaches payroll. Before it reaches debt service. Before it shelves the expansion you had planned for spring.

Call that window your tolerance band. How wide it runs depends on customer mix, contract structure and how much cash sits on the balance sheet. A marketer whose book skews residential and fixed-price has a very different band than one serving agricultural accounts at spot. Neither position is better. They are different and they call for different decisions.

Owners with thin reserves carry the narrowest bands, which is exactly when hedging feels most expensive. Protection on the downside costs you upside, and in a year when prices break your way, that cost stings. Make the trade deliberately rather than by default. A narrow band still beats no band at all.

One wrinkle deserves naming. Your tolerance band gets built on payroll, debt service and growth assumptions, and those assumptions usually trace back to the same price forecast the band exists to



protect you from. The logic bites its own tail a little. That is less a problem to solve than a reason to run the same thinking up one level to how you borrow.

APPLYING THE SAME LOGIC TO DEBT

Financing tends to get judged against the rate environment on the day you sign, as though that is the environment you will live in for the next seven years.

Run it against three scenarios instead: rates roughly where they are now, rates easing over the coming year and rates climbing again over the next 12 to 24 months. If the bobtail, the storage addition or the territory purchase only works in one of those three, you want that on the table before closing rather than after.

None of this argues against borrowing. Growth in propane almost always takes debt. It argues for structuring the loan so the business holds up across more than one version of the next five years.

THE RANGE DOESN'T STOP AT THE BUSINESS'S EDGE

Here's where I see the gap most often. Owners get disciplined about pricing. They get disciplined about financing. Then, they treat their personal balance sheet as though it lives somewhere else entirely. In most family-owned propane businesses, it doesn't. Personal guarantees on equipment notes, home equity pledged as collateral, retirement savings concentrated in the value of the company itself — that is one exposure wearing two hats.

A tolerance band can carry payroll and debt service through a warm winter and still tell you nothing about whether your retirement date survives it. Or a child's tuition. Or your ability to sell on your own timeline instead of someone else's. Those questions relate to each other, but they aren't the same question, and it pays to check every so often whether they have quietly collapsed into one.

MAKING THE RANGE A HABIT, NOT A 1-TIME EXERCISE

None of this works as a one-time exercise.



Pricing lives with operations. Financing lives with whoever handles the bank relationship. Cash flow gets managed against whatever feels most urgent that month. Left in separate lanes, the three drift apart, and the drift usually goes unnoticed until something forces a look.

The owners who ride out uncertainty most calmly review all of it together on a schedule. Quarterly suits most operations. It takes no finance department, just one recurring question: If conditions moved hard against this business, what would have to be true for our pricing, our debt, our cash position and my own financial plan to hold? Then, fix whatever the answer exposes while fixing it is still cheap.

Conditions will keep moving — that is not in question. Planning for a range of outcomes may help turn some unexpected developments into adjustments rather than crises.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS FOR PROPANE MARKETERS

- **Plan around a band, not a number:** Size it to what payroll, debt service and growth can actually absorb, then let your contracts, hedges and prebuys work inside it.
- **Stress-test financing before you sign:** Run every loan against at least two rate scenarios, not just the one sitting in front of you on closing day.
- **Watch your circular logic:** Your tolerance band, your borrowing capacity and your growth plans all lean

on each other. Review them together, or you will fool yourself.

- **Give your own balance sheet the same treatment:** Personal guarantees and retirement savings concentrated in company value mean the business plan does not automatically cover you.
- **Get it on the calendar:** Quarterly beats waiting for a bad stretch to force the conversation.

No plan makes the propane business predictable. But planning around a range of futures may help a business prepare for volatility and respond more deliberately when conditions change.

Author's Note: *This is intended for informational purposes only. You should not assume that any discussion or information contained in this document serves as the receipt of, or as a substitute for, personalized investment advice from Savant. Please consult your investment professional regarding your unique situation.*

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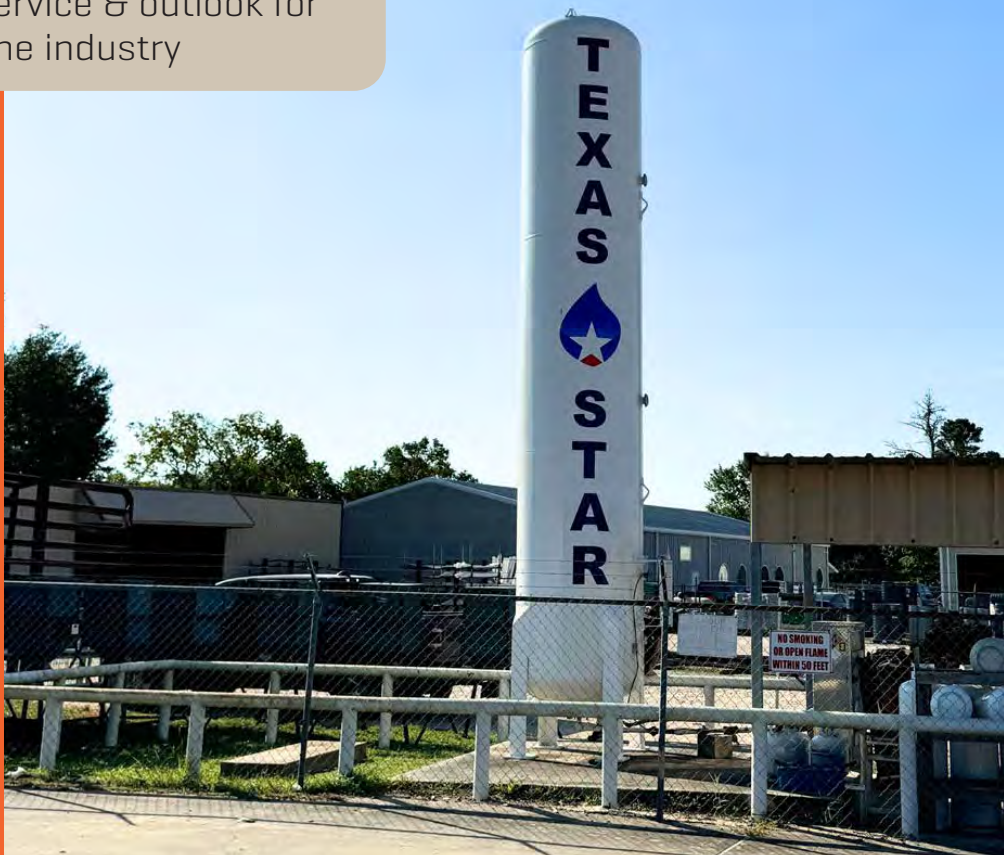


MATADOR GAS

Matador Gas discusses its growth strategy, commitment to local service & outlook for the future of the propane industry



Matador Gas is committed to providing safe and reliable propane service to the markets it serves in both Texas and Arkansas. Those services include propane delivery, tank installation, cylinder delivery and exchange services for residential and commercial users. The company's leadership team has over 100 years of combined experience in the industry, and as Matador Gas proclaims on its website, "We're proud of our history. We're proud of our people. We're proud of how we conduct our business and we're proud of how we serve our customers with clean-burning propane gas." In the pages ahead, Crystelle Markley, director of marketing at Matador Gas, shares about the company's history and the purpose it serves in its communities.



Can you tell us about your company history?

Matador Gas was launched in 2021 as a startup company by propane industry veteran Matt Terry, who previously worked for Mission Gas and Pinnacle Propane. Matt grew up in the propane business with his parents, who owned Mission Gas out of San Antonio, Texas, which is now owned by Matador.

With the backing of private equity group Firmament, Matador was formed to target and acquire well-run propane companies with the intention of maintaining their legacy, increasing profitability and ensuring seamless transitions. Since 2021, Matador has grown significantly, now owning seven

brands across Arkansas and Texas and continuing to work to preserve the relationships and service that have defined these businesses for generations.

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

We currently serve markets in Arkansas and Texas in all segments of the industry. Our Texas coverage includes customers in east, south and central Texas, including the greater San Antonio and Austin areas and the Highland Lakes. In Arkansas, we reach north-central, central and northwest Arkansas, including the greater Little Rock and Fayetteville areas.

Matador Gas
Founder Matt Terry
with his family



Can you tell us a story that demonstrates how an employee or multiple employees embody your company values?

One recent example of our values in action came during the devastating July 4 floods [in 2025], which severely impacted the Highland Lakes area of Texas. In the aftermath, that community faced tremendous destruction, with roads blocked by debris, properties damaged and families beginning the overwhelming process of cleaning up and rebuilding along with significant loss of life.

The team at 4-T Propane, one of our Texas companies, quickly recognized they had something that could make a difference. Rather than focusing on getting back to normal

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

At Matador, our purpose is to safely and passionately fuel our customers' and employees' lives. We believe selling propane is more than delivering fuel; it's about earning trust and taking care of people. Our values drive how we work every day. We do what we say we will do and take pride in it, make safety a priority, continuously look for ways to improve and put our customers and employees first. We bring those values to life through safe, dependable service, responsive customer care and a commitment to excellence for our staff.

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

As Matador grows, we remain focused on preserving the personal relationships and local service our customers know and trust while providing the resources and support needed to continually improve their overall experience. We know that acquisitions in our industry often come

with changes that negatively impact both the customers and employees, and we are dedicated to a different approach. There is a reason that some of the most successful businesses in the country have decided to sell to us, and we feel an immense sense of responsibility to stay true to their ways of doing business.



Team members of Matador Gas company Texas Star celebrate the retirement of Michael Reed.



4-T Propane team members help in the aftermath of catastrophic July 4 floods in Texas in 2025.

business operations, employees put their resources to work helping their neighbors. They used their trucks and equipment to help clear roads and remove debris, making it possible for people to get through the hard-to-reach areas. The team was also working to locate propane tanks and equipment that had been displaced by the floodwaters and helping to address potential safety concerns in the community. But during those first critical days, their priority was simply helping people. In a time of tremendous devastation, they demonstrated that being a propane company means more than providing fuel; it means being part of the community and being willing to show up when others need you most.

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

One of the biggest trends impacting the propane industry in recent years is increasingly unpredictable weather and warmer winter seasons. Because so much propane is used for heating, weather has a direct impact on demand. The challenge is planning for inventory, staffing and resources well in advance without knowing what the winter will ultimately bring.

At the same time, we are seeing the continued growth of electrification and

increased competition from alternative energy sources. Electricity's share of residential heating has steadily increased over the past decade, making it more important than ever for the propane industry to communicate the benefits of propane and demonstrate its value as a reliable, efficient and versatile energy source. This is one of the reasons our executive team is committed to legislative and educational involvement in the propane industry at both the state and national levels.

These trends have reinforced the importance of being adaptable and customer-focused. We concentrate on building strong customer relationships, operating efficiently and continually looking for ways to grow beyond traditional heating demand. We believe the propane industry has a strong future but maintaining that position will require us to continue educating consumers, embracing innovation and making sure propane remains a competitive and dependable energy choice.

What value do you believe propane businesses provide to the public?

Propane businesses provide something that is essential to everyday life: reliable, safe and accessible energy. For many families, farms and businesses, propane is what keeps homes warm, water hot,

food cooked and businesses running, often in communities where other energy sources may not be as readily available.

But Matador's values go beyond the fuel itself. We believe our local brands play an important part in the community, and our customers count on us to be there when they need us, especially during the coldest days of the year or when unexpected needs arise. That creates a level of trust and personal connection that is increasingly rare.

Where do you hope to see the propane industry in the next five to 10 years?

We hope to see propane continue to be recognized as a vital part of America's energy future, not an energy source of the past. The industry is facing real challenges as electrification continues to expand. We believe it is important to advocate for energy choice and make sure consumers have access to the energy solution that best fits their home, business and community.

Propane offers something that will remain increasingly important in the years ahead: reliability, resiliency and energy independence. As electricity demand continues to grow and the grid faces increasing pressure, propane can provide dependable on-site energy, backup power and an important layer of energy diversity.

Over the next 10 years, we want to see the propane industry continue to innovate, invest and make its voice heard. That means advancing technologies, expanding propane's role in power generation and resiliency, and educating policymakers and consumers about the benefits of propane. We believe the future of energy should be about choice, not one-size-fits-all solutions. We want propane to remain a leading, trusted and innovative part of that future, and we intend to do our part to help make that happen. 📌

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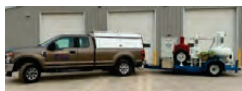
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ADVERTISER INDEX

Advertiser	Page
Alpha Tank Services	37
Aultra Tank & Equipment.....	IFC
BLT Tanks LLC.....	45
Cavagna North America.....	15
Cetane Associates.....	19
Lock America Inc.....	39
LPG & NH3 Supply Inc.....	26
Marshall Excelsior	9
Metsa Tanks	11
NEXIO	14
Nixon & Lindstrom Insurance.....	35
OPW Propane Energy Solutions: RegO/MEC	BC
Otodata Technologies USA Inc.	1, IBC
Propane Education & Research Council.....	21, 32
Quality Steel Corporation.....	7
Rural Computer Consultants.....	39
TerraVest Industries.....	20
Vertrax.....	27

Trey Nichols

Executive Vice President
Silverline Solutions



Describe your role in your company. As one of the cofounders and a member of the leadership team at Silverline Solutions, I work across many different aspects of the company. A big part of my role is making sure everything we do stays aligned with our mission, core values and commitment to providing exceptional service. I speak with customers regularly, which gives me a direct understanding of the challenges they are facing and where technology can make a meaningful difference in their businesses. I also play a key role in the software and product side of Silverline. I spend a lot of time identifying opportunities where technology can improve efficiency, profitability and overall operational performance for propane and fuel companies.

What would surprise someone about the work you do? Just how industry-specific our work really is. From the outside, it can look like we simply provide software solutions and IT services like cloud hosting, cybersecurity, IT support and so on; but in reality, the work goes much deeper than that. To support a propane company well, you have to understand how the business operates. That means understanding dispatch, deliveries, customer service, trucks, communications and how all of those areas affect one another. Technology touches nearly every part of the operation, so when something changes or fails, the impact can extend far beyond IT. If you don't understand the industry and how those pieces connect, even a seemingly small technology decision can create significant operational disruption.

What advice do you have for someone coming into the industry? Listen, learn and build relationships. One of the greatest strengths of the propane industry is its people. There are so many knowledgeable, experienced professionals who have spent years serving their communities, and I have a tremendous amount of respect for them. Take time to learn from the people who do the work every day. You can learn something from everyone. ... There is an incredible amount of institutional knowledge in this industry, and the more you listen, the more you understand how all the pieces fit together.

What industry development or opportunity are you most excited about? The easy answer would be to call out

AI — but none of us really know where that is going to take us right now (or the dangers it poses, as well). What excites me most is seeing more companies recognize the value of using their data to make smarter, faster business decisions. There is a tremendous difference between looking at a report at the end of the month after everything has already occurred versus having near real-time insight and the ability to drive meaningful change. That kind of agility through visibility can have a real impact on efficiency, profitability, customer service and overall performance. The real opportunity is bringing information together, identifying what actually requires someone's attention and helping people make better decisions from it. AI, predictive analytics and operational intelligence will certainly play a role in that future, but they need to be implemented thoughtfully. There is a lot of excitement around AI right now, and understandably so, but companies also need to consider security, privacy and how these tools are being used.

What or who motivates you? The “what” and the “who” are really intertwined for me. My family has always been a major driving force in my life, and they continue to motivate me in everything I do. Our employees at Silverline are another big part of that. I want Silverline to be a place where people feel like they are part of something meaningful, where they have the opportunity to succeed, grow and truly thrive. Our customers' success motivates me tremendously. Nothing drives me more than knowing our customers are protected, supported and well taken care of. I love hearing their success stories, whether they come from the software we've developed, the cloud hosting we provide or the support our team delivers every day. Knowing that our work has made a real difference in someone's business is incredibly rewarding.

How would you spend an unexpected day off? What's a day off? I'm kidding, of course. If I had an unexpected day off (and assuming my wife didn't hand me a honey-do list), I'd probably take my family and my dogs somewhere that has a trail or boardwalk beside the water to where we could just enjoy spending time together and have a nice meal together. That sounds like a pretty perfect day to me! 🍷

For an extended conversation with Trey Nichols, visit bpnews.com/industry-insider.

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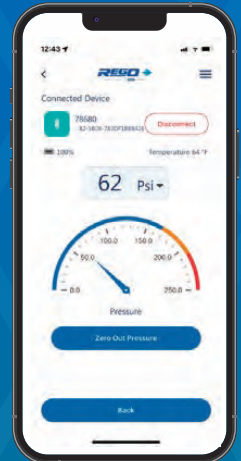
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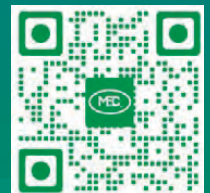
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