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P3 Propane Safety

# Documenting Critical Interruptions of Service

When colder temperatures roll around, more propane gallons are ordered and delivered—and you know what that means: more interruptions of service. Interruption-of-service calls may be caused by an empty tank, gas leak, equipment failure, inaccurate delivery schedule or increased gas demand caused by weather. Regardless of the reason for the call, every propane company must have a proper protocol to ensure that such situations are handled correctly.

These actionable tips will help your team respond to interruptions of service in a quick, safe and efficient manner. Implementing these routines will help you maintain compliance, keep everyone safe and reduce risk.

## Proper Digital Documentation

It is imperative that your propane company documents any response to

interruptions of service clearly and that the documentation is stored for your records. In the event of litigation, documentation serves as legal protection. Having easily accessible digital documentation with photos is the best way to protect your company.

Roughly half of all propane accidents are caused by do-it-yourself (DIY) homeowners modifying their equipment. Having photo documentation of container sets and records of every homeowner's service history will also serve to protect your company in the event of an interruption of service situation caused by homeowner modifications.

You've heard it before: *If it isn't documented, it didn't happen.* Properly documenting interruption-of-service calls and how your team responded is crucial to protect your company—and the employee performing the work—in case of litigation.

## Written, Updated Policies & Procedures

Having a written manual is an Industry best practice recommended to help your company avoid unnecessary risk. Do you have written policies and procedures for all scenarios, including interruptions of service? That must be part of your manual, established to keep your employees and customers safe and to protect your company in the event of litigation.

Written policies and procedures will guide your team during an interruption-of-service response and make handling these potentially dangerous situations much safer and easier to execute. Whether you need to create a policy and procedure for interruption of service calls or you already have one, ensure it includes the following:

1. A written script for customer service representatives to use when answering interruption-of-service calls from customers.

2. A plan for how to handle interruption-of-service situations outside regular business hours.

3. A procedure for your drivers to follow when responding to the call, including if they complete the leak check before or after fuel is added and if they lock out the tank if the leak check fails.

## Initial & Refresher Training for Employees

Training is essential for handling interruption-of-service situations. Do all relevant personnel have proper and updated training to perform their responsibilities appropriately? Start by thinking about your customer service representatives



Brent Cammett, Director of Safety & Training Services; P3 Propane Safety Consulting, Training, and Risk Management Services, shown teaching class.

(CSRs). They are the people answering the phones and therefore the first line of communication with the customer. It is crucial that every CSR is trained in how to handle interruption-of-service calls so they can communicate with the customer, as well as dispatch drivers and service technicians, in a timely and compliant manner.

For example, all CSRs should respond to an odor complaint the same way. Instructions should include:

- Evacuate the structure and keep a safe distance from the building.
- Eliminate all sources of ignition.
- Do not operate any electrical switches (On or Off).
- Conduct further communication with the customer outside the structure.
- Once outside the structure and if the service valve for the propane supply can be reached safely, turn off the propane supply.
- For a metered account, turn off the supply valve before you turn off the meter or regulator if the gas odor or possible leak was reported within the unit.
- Once outside the structure, do not allow anyone except your propane company or fire service personnel to enter the building until it has been deemed safe to do so.

Beyond the CSR, consider the rest of your team. Initial training and annual refreshers are crucial for the drivers and technicians who respond to and remedy these scenarios. Drivers and service technicians alike should understand how to complete the procedures in your Policies & Procedures manual, perform their responsibilities accordingly and document the response to the interruption-of-service situation in the field.

## Documenting the Container Hazard Tagging System

Warning call tags alert customers about a safety hazard and provide instructions to contact you, the propane marketer. Various colored warning tags (with white and orange being the most common) can be left at the residence of customers who are not at home and whose gas supply valve has been closed, letting them know not to use the tank until they call your company to authorize remediation of the issue.

How is your company keeping track of these warning tags? If you don't have them saved in a digital dashboard that your management can view at the click of a button, there's room for improvement in your interruption-of-service procedure. Partnering with a documentation and compliance software company can help get your hazard warning tag process more organized and efficient.

## The Busy Interruption-of-Service Season

These scenarios are an unavoidable part of running a propane company during the Winter months, and it's critical that you remedy and document them appropriately to improve your regulatory compliance and reduce risk. If your propane company's existing practices don't quite match up to the recommended protocol above, now's the time to get organized as the rain-drops turn into snowflakes.

The key elements recommended in this column are not just for safety but also for efficiency. We all know how precious every minute of billable time is during the busy season. Having a streamlined interruption of service protocol in place will help your staff address, respond to and resolve these situations safely without losing valuable time. **ICM**

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