

Customer-owned tank permissions

HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS WHEN PERFORMING LEAK CHECKS

Unlike company-owned tanks, you may need to obtain permission to lock a customer-owned tank until the leak is located and repaired – and many of them are hesitant to give permission.

I'll guide you through some options when having this difficult conversation with the customer and how you can ensure the customer and their family stay as safe as possible when handling a possible propane leak.

► PROPER LEAK CHECK PROTOCOL

I'm willing to bet that your company's policies and procedures manual outlines that any suspected leak requires a check of the entire propane system – from the propane container all the way to the gas control, which typically includes going inside the house. After all, gas code requires a leak check when an interruption of service occurs. You're likely expected to check an array of things, including but not limited to the following:

- The tank and connections.
- All active gas lines.
- Valves to appliances with 100 percent safety shutoffs.
- Gas control to the appliance.
- Manifold where branch is turned off, where applicable.
- Closed valves do not lead to uncapped lines – if so, cap or plug.

In a perfect world, we could find and fix any issues on the spot. But other times, the container will have to be locked and tagged for remediation at a later date.

If the customer owns the tank, you may need the homeowner's permission to lock it. It is often easiest to get permission when the customer calls to report the suspected leak.

But sometimes, customers will decline. Homeowners may refuse a tank lock for many reasons, but it's your job as their safety professional to have this important conversation with them.

Note: If the customer refuses a tank lock, follow best practice and place a container shutoff label. This will limit your liability as a propane provider if the customer decides to proceed with use of the tank against recommendations.

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► HOW TO HAVE THIS DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

1. Determine their reasoning and pain point. Before deciding your approach, it's important to understand the reason why the customer is refusing. Perhaps they don't understand the risk of a gas leak. Maybe they are afraid of having no heat on a winter night. Perhaps they worry about the cost of what they perceive as "optional" service, since they are allowed to decline. Asking questions to determine their reason for refusal will aid in your approach to change their mind.

2. Offer a solution that meets their needs. If the customer is refusing a tank lock, you need to provide an offer that alleviates their specific concerns. Keep in mind, customer service is king, and

outstanding customer service includes placating concerns. Once you know the customer's reason for refusal to lock the tank, use this as a guide for a suggested solution.

Here are some common reasons for refusal and solutions you can offer to help change the customer's mind.

• **Customer doesn't understand the danger:** Tell them what can happen if they refuse a tank lock. Make sure they understand that federal codes and guidelines strongly recommend a tank lock to avoid putting the property, homeowners and neighborhood at risk.

• **Customer worries about lack of heat:** Offer a temporary tank installation until you can determine and fix the source of the leak. A 100-pound cylinder will usually be enough to hold them over until your team can fix the problem with the main tank.

• **Customer has cost concerns:** If your company doesn't charge for a tank lock and leak check, let the customer know. If there is a fee, make sure the customer understands the critical nature of this emergency. Offer flexible payment options in line with your company's offerings and operating procedure.

If the customer continues to disagree, let them know your next steps in line with your company's policies and procedures manual. These commonly involve tagging the tank, calling the local fire department to report the suspected leak and putting a propane delivery block on their address until the issue is addressed. **LPG**



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