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# The Proper Way to Handle an Interruption of Service

The term “Interruption of Service” defines any circumstance where propane stops flowing from the container to the appliance. There are a variety of instances that would cause this to happen, and each requires a unique response from your team of propane technicians. This article outlines various types of interruptions of service (IOS) and key components for responding to these situations in a way that will keep your team safe and optimize your operational efficiency.

## Types of Interruption of Service

- Run-out/Empty Container
- Odor Complaint
- Appliance Malfunction
- Seasonal Operation
- Regulator Malfunction or Replacement
- Leak and System Check
- Replacement of Existing Gas Piping
- System/Appliance Placed Back in Service
- Container/Appliance Replacement

No matter the type of interruption of service, proper protocol should be followed and enforced to keep everyone safe. Here are the top three protocols every propane marketer should be sure to employ:

### 1. Policies & Procedures

Having a written Policies & Procedures Manual is best practice to help your company operate smoothly and avoid unnecessary risk. Since gas code requires a leak check when an interruption of service occurs, your manual likely outlines that any suspected leak requires a check of the entire propane system—from the container to the gas control inside. This would include:

- a. All active gas lines
- b. Gas control to the appliance

- c. The container and connections
- d. Manifold where branch is turned off, where applicable
- e. Closed valves do not lead to uncapped lines
- f. Valves to appliances with 100% safety shutoffs

Your policy and procedure for interruption-of-service calls should also include a plan for how to handle after-hours interruption of service situations. Review and update all procedures annually, prior to the season’s start.

### 2. Training for Employees

Your customer service representatives are the first line of communication with the customer. Create a script for customer service representatives to use when answering IOS calls from customers. Additionally, drivers and service technicians should understand how to complete the procedures, perform their responsibilities accordingly and document the response.

### 3. Proper Documentation

Your team must document the interruption of service response and keep the record on file. In the event of litigation, documentation is your legal protection. Having easily accessible digital documentation with photos is the best way to protect your company.

Roughly half of propane accidents are caused by DIY homeowners modifying their equipment. Having documentation of every location’s service history and photos of container sets will protect your company in the event of an interruption of service caused by homeowner modifications.

### Acquiring Customer Permission to Lock Their Container

You may need permission to lock a customer-owned container. It is easiest to get permission from the customer when they call to report the suspected leak, but sometimes they may decline. In this case, try to understand the rea-

son why the customer is refusing. Once you know the reason, you can suggest a solution that placates their concerns to help change their mind. Here are some solution ideas:

#### • Cost Concerns

If your company doesn’t charge for a container lock and leak check, let the customer know. If there is a fee associated, make sure the customer understands the critical nature of this emergency. Offer them flexible payment options in line with your company’s offerings.

#### • Lack of Understanding of the Danger

Tell customers what can happen if they refuse a container lock. Make sure they understand that Federal codes and guidelines strongly recommend a container lock to help avoid putting the homeowners, property and neighborhood at risk.

#### • Fear of No Heat

Run through the list of options that you can offer to the customer based on their specific circumstances. Explain your company’s willingness to give them a solution while keeping them safe in what has the potential to be a very dangerous situation.

If the customer continues to disagree, communicate your next steps in line with your Policies & Procedures manual. These commonly involve tagging the container, calling the fire department to report the suspected leak, and putting a propane delivery block on their address until the issue is resolved. This will limit your liability as a propane provider if the customer decides to proceed with use of the container against recommendations.

### Protect Customers & Company with your IOS Process

How does your company protocol for IOS situations stack up? A streamlined and bulletproof protocol will help your staff address, respond to and resolve these situations safely without losing valuable time—and most importantly, keep your customers, employees and company safe. **ICM**