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COMMONLY OVERLOOKED TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Prioritizing safety training is essential for propane marketers to maintain compliance, reduce risk & ensure teams are properly equipped to meet regulatory requirements

BY BRENT CAMMETT

Propane marketers have a lot on their minds — how to sell more gallons, where to find qualified drivers, the best way to staff emergency calls and how to keep up with competition in the market. But one of the biggest and most important responsibilities of the propane marketer is proper safety training for all team

members. Initial and recurring training at your propane business will always be a crucial step to maintaining a business that can operate safely and sufficiently, no matter the outside factors.

If you onboard each member of your team with proper training requirements, you're off to a great start. But what

about your ongoing safety training and management program? Safety training doesn't end with basic certifications or commercial driver's licenses. In fact, safety training and companywide communication is essential to maintain compliance with Department of Transportation (DOT), Occupational Safety and Hazard Administration, and state regulatory requirements. That's why propane safety experts recommend that propane companies outsource their training to a full-time compliance expert who is familiar and comfortable with federal guidelines, as well as requirements in your jurisdiction. After all, sometimes the hardest part of meeting safety requirements is knowing where to begin.

This article will cover the most common — yet often overlooked —

training requirements that will help keep your propane company in compliance and reduce regulatory risk at your establishment.

CATHODIC PROTECTION TESTING

The National Fire Protection Agency's (NFPA) Liquefied Petroleum Gas Code 58 requires routine cathodic testing requirements for underground propane tanks, 2011 and newer. Are you aware of how to meet specific code requirements efficiently? Every underground propane storage container should be thoroughly inspected for proper cathodic protection, as leaks are hard to detect and can cause huge insurance issues. For this reason, insurance brokers can be seen going out of their way to ensure that cathodic training and inspections are being upheld per NFPA requirements.

HANDS-ON FIELD TRAINING

Propane employees don't want to admit they don't understand something, and many managers don't have the time or experience to identify mistakes from the reporting alone. The combination of those issues alongside the online direction propane training is going means that employees may be doing something incorrectly for years without even knowing there's a problem. Hands-on field training provides a unique opportunity for a trainer to get to your company location and build rapport with your field team. After all, education in a hands-on environment is how most tradespeople learn best. Field training is highly recommended to help ensure the message sticks.

Work field training into your safety training regimen this year to maximize your training time and help technicians and drivers absorb more information on a deeper level of understanding than they would receive in a classroom.

DRIVER RIDE-ALONG TRAINING

Driver ride-along training allows safety experts to ride along in the bobtail of a working driver or technician and analyze their performance, creating a detailed

performance log and future training schedule. Spending time in the field with a professional safety trainer fosters an environment in which mistakes and issues present themselves. As the trainer develops rapport with the field team, they start to let their guard down and feel more comfortable asking questions about work they've just learned how to do or have been performing regularly for years. Best of all, driver ride-along training can be done during regular daily operations — no downtime required.

For example, recently on a ride-along with a client in the mid-Atlantic, our team was surprised to learn that the technician did not know how to perform a leak check using their 300-pound block gauge. This information allowed us to coach this technician who had been in the field for six years and never had proper training to use a block gauge (and had also taught other employees how to perform leak checks). Our coaching was received positively and appreciated by the employee, who was glad to have acquired a new skill set he didn't have before.

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS HANDLING (HAZMAT)

According to the Department of Transportation, new employees must be fully trained in DOT HAZMAT requirements within 90 days of employment and before they're out working on their own. Existing employees must complete recurrent safety training every three years or when a job function changes. Marketers should diligently track who attends the training and ensure that it is completed according to guidelines.

JOB-SPECIFIC TRAINING

Job-specific training allows for customized training based on what an individual may or may not be doing, such as DOT cylinder requalification, crane training, monthly meter creep tests, loading bobtails and cathodic testing. This type of training is critical for your employees, all of whom have differing

responsibilities that must be carried out properly for the safety of the customer, employee and company.

CRANE TRAINING

Crane training for the propane industry is another example. Not to be confused with a hoisting license, this training shares important safety information with employees, such as safety features, operating procedures, rigging materials and load chart deciphering.

NOT SURE WHERE TO START? SCHEDULE A COMPLIANCE ASSESSMENT

Selling a staple like propane introduces significant responsibilities when it comes to the safety of your customers and employees. The best way to promote safety at your propane company is to ensure your training meets or exceeds minimum requirements set by federal, state and local jurisdictions.

So how do you get started? Many propane companies decide to seek out a compliance assessment, which is an on-site analysis of documentation and business practices. This simulates a DOT inspection but allows you the opportunity to get your files and training in order by knowing the top priorities as it pertains to local and federal requirements.

Working with an external compliance expert will allow you to provide top-notch safety training and consulting for just a fraction of the cost of employing an in-house team member. And don't worry — the top safety experts are knowledgeable in requirements nationwide, so you can remain confident that information shared is always relevant and applicable to your specific location. 📍

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