COVID-19
SAFETY ALERT

All organizations are currently struggling to deal with the ramifications of the national health crisis created by the COVID-19 outbreak. The following information is intended to assist propane marketers in this unprecedented situation.

OSHA GUIDELINES

The Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) https://www.osha.gov/ advises that the COVID-19 virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person, including:

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has SARS-CoV-2 on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the primary way the virus spreads.

People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (i.e., experiencing fever, cough, and/or shortness of breath). Some spread might be possible before people show symptoms; there have been reports of this type of asymptomatic transmission with this new coronavirus, but this is also not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) https://www.who.int, it is not certain how long the virus that causes COVID-19 survives on surfaces, but it seems to behave like other coronaviruses. Studies suggest that coronaviruses (including preliminary information on the COVID-19 virus) may persist on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days. This may vary under different conditions (e.g. type of surface, temperature or humidity of the environment).

Based on the information above, there are many factors that companies may want to consider when addressing their daily operations, employees, and customers regarding COVID-19.
PROPANE MARKETER - NEED TO KNOW

- Be aware of Federal advisories from reliable sources such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) [https://www.osha.gov/](https://www.osha.gov/), the Center for Disease Control (CDC) [https://www.cdc.gov/](https://www.cdc.gov/), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) [https://www.hhs.gov/](https://www.hhs.gov/).
- Be aware of state or local actions or restrictions that might apply to businesses. Different states and jurisdictions have issued a variety of requirements so there may be different requirement that can be region/state specific.
- Individual companies may already have some policies in place for deliveries, entry to structures, out of gas, etc. These may need to be modified or specific procedures may need to be developed.
- Based on the rapidly developing changes in this unprecedented situation, modifications to operating procedures may need to be made very frequently so communication with employees may need to be done on a frequent or as-needed basis depending on the situation.

OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Additional training for employees on COVID-19 and company policies on interaction with customers and co-workers.
- Procedures or prohibitions for customers / vendors that may come to offices or other company buildings.
- Updating procedures for employees at customer locations (some issues to consider)
  - Procedures for entering an occupied building for routine work.
  - Procedures for entering an occupied building for emergencies.
  - Is there an ability for social distancing when entry is made to an occupied building?
  - Is there a way to determine if there are ill people or confirmed cases of COVID-19 prior to entering an occupied building?
  - Is there specific Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that may be required for entry to the building (health care centers/nursing homes).
  - Procedures for employees if residents prohibit employee’s entry to a building in an emergency.
  - Can certain procedures at customer locations be modified to reduce personal contact?
Are there any specific procedures that delivery personnel can change to reduce customer interaction?

- Are there opportunities for office employees to work remotely?
- Can employees’ schedules be staggered to reduce contact between employees?
- How are work areas, including vehicles, disinfected if used by multiple employees?
- How are cylinders handled by the public or in exchange situations being handled by employees?
- Are employees equipped with the necessary Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for the type of exposures that they may encounter? (IE. Gloves, disinfectant, eye protection)
- Increased communications with customers on how your organization is operating during this crisis.

**COMPANY-CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS**

- Before entering a customer's home, if anyone is present, employees should ask if they or anyone in the household is sick in any way or experiencing symptoms, including fever, coughing and/or shortness of breath.
- Whenever possible rely on phone, text, email, teleconferencing, or other electronic communication methods to communicate with customers, instead of in-person conversations.
- Facemasks and gloves should be considered on service calls. If used, follow established glove and mask protocols, including proper disposal.
- If your company offers online delivery/service requests and payments, encourage customers to pay their bills online and to call your office only in the event of an out of gas situation, gas odor or no-heat emergency.
- If possible, send delivery and service invoices by mail or switch to electronic invoicing instead of leaving invoices at the door.
- Avoid all direct contact with customers and maintain the maximum distance possible: at least six feet.
- On service calls, if the customer has separate access to their propane appliances, try to request in advance that they make the area available to you directly, e.g., garage doors, cellar doors, etc.

**OUT OF GAS OR GAS ODOR CALLS**

- Follow established company policies for customer instructions and responding to customer locations.
- If there are sick occupants that need to be evacuated, contact 911 for instructions or response.
- For out of gas or gas odor calls, if entry into structure is not recommended or prudent, the system should be secured and tagged.
- If performing a leak check, determine if the process can be done outside of the structure using a block test or tapping into an outside regulator.
If the leak check passes, consider having the customer start appliances if it is safe to do so to avoid entry into the structure.

If the leak check fails and entry into the building is not recommended or prudent, the system should be secured and tagged.

EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE INTERACTIONS

- Follow the Center for Disease Control [https://www.cdc.gov/](https://www.cdc.gov/) guidelines for minimizing risk of exposure.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are touched frequently. These include desks, keyboards, office and mobile phones, doorknobs, faucet handles, vehicle door handles, steering wheels, etc.
- If possible, instruct delivery and service personnel to perform their duties without interacting in person with office staff. For example, electronically send work orders, delivery tickets and driver routes.
- Sick employees are a risk to others; the CDC recommends home quarantine for 14 days.
- Where possible, segment work teams into isolated smaller units so that an outbreak in one unit doesn’t necessarily affect all.
- Where possible, stagger shifts or starting times to reduce employee interaction.
- There are many rapidly changing laws and regulations related to sick time, paid leave and essential employees. Contact your state’s department of labor or state propane gas association as these differ dramatically depending on location and continue to change as the situation evolves.

Although propane equipment and activities may be similar throughout the county, each organization has unique operational functions and working conditions. Therefore, it is important for companies to develop their own operating procedures, identify possible exposures, and take actions that they feel are appropriate for their particular operations.

For additional propane safety and educational information please visit the Propane Education and Research Council’s website at [https://propane.com/](https://propane.com/).

For specific questions please contact the following PERC staff: Eric Kuster, VP Safety, Education and Compliance ([eric.kuster@propane.com](mailto:eric.kuster@propane.com)), or Lyndon Rickards, Director of Safety and Compliance ([Lyndon.rickards@propane.com](mailto:Lyndon.rickards@propane.com)).