The Ruling on Propane Cylinders

In the interest of consumer safety, overfill protection devices (OPDs) have been required on all new propane cylinders with a capacity from 4 pounds to 40 pounds since Sept. 30, 1998. Propane cylinders for gas grills hold about 20 pounds of propane, thus coming under this requirement. The OPD, which is a part of the filling valve, serves as a safety shut-off device and prevents overfilling of propane cylinders to avert propane release, fire and possible injury.

A new ruling (NFPA 58, Section 2.3.1.5, the LP-Gas Code) published by the National Fire Protection Association and adopted by North Carolina, states that as of April 1, 2002:

• All new cylinders must be manufactured with overfill protection devices (OPDs); and
• Cylinders without OPDs are no longer permitted to be refilled by anyone.

How Can I Tell If My Cylinder Has An Overfill Protection Device (OPD)?

Most cylinders with a triangular valve wheel have an OPD. Also, cylinders that have an overfill protection device will have the letters “OPD” on the valve hand wheel and the side of the valve. This picture is an example of a valve with an OPD. Called an Acme valve, this type prevents overfilling of propane cylinders and keeps propane from being released when the valve is opened without a grill or other propane-using device attached. The Acme valve is slightly larger than valves without an overfill protection device, and has external threads.

What Does the Old Type Valve Look Like?

Cylinders with a round or star-shaped valve wheel usually do not have an OPD. This type of valve is called a “POL,” so named for the manufacturer who devised it. To tighten this type of valve, attach the connection to your grill or other propane-using device by turning the fitting counterclockwise. Propane will be released freely if you open the POL valve with no fitting attached. The valve pictured here is the old type POL. Under the new ruling, effective April 1, 2002, cylinders with this type of valve cannot be refilled until the POL valve is replaced with the new OPD valve.
What If My Cylinder Doesn’t Have An OPD?

If you have a propane cylinder that does not have an OPD it cannot be refilled and must be upgraded with the new OPD valve when the ruling goes into effect April 1, 2002. You may choose either to have the old valve removed and replaced with an OPD or you can take your old cylinder to an exchange cabinet, like those at convenience and hardware stores, and pay an upgrade fee for a new cylinder with the OPD device. You can find cylinders with the new OPD valves at propane companies, hardware stores and discount stores. Your local propane company should be able to replace the old valve for you or exchange your propane cylinder for a new one equipped with an OPD.

What Can I Do With My Old Cylinder?

Call or visit your local propane dealer to ask if they can exchange or accept your cylinder. Some propane providers can take your old cylinder and refurbish and reuse it. In some areas, larger cylinder exchanges like Blue Rhino and RapidXchange may take your old cylinder and charge a one-time upgrade fee in exchange for new equipment. Call Blue Rhino at (800) 566-9215 or RapidXchange at (800) 354-7250 to locate their North Carolina exchange centers. Should you already have a new cylinder and simply want to get rid of the old one, some larger cylinder exchange cabinets or stores may have space to store donated cylinders. Tank Recyclers, a division of TYS Inc., recycles and restores old gas grill cylinders and returns them to the marketplace. This company charges a modest handling fee but will collect tanks at no charge in quantities of 100 or more. Contact them at (888) 445-0579 ext. 2145, or (401) 258-9800.

If, for some reason, you are unable to exchange your cylinder, RECYCLE IT! Propane cylinders are made of metal and can be recycled as metal scrap. Be sure to call ahead to your local scrap metal dealer to see whether they accept cylinders and how to handle them before recycling. The scrap dealers that accept cylinders require that the valve be removed. Although North Carolina allows for disposal of obsolete cylinders in landfills provided that the valve is completely removed and the tank is pierced, most landfills will not accept them in any condition.

What Can I NOT Do With My Propane Cylinder?

- If your cylinder is damaged, obsolete or unable be retrofitted, you should not abandon it. Doing so could create serious environmental and safety problems.

- DO NOT PUT YOUR CYLINDER INTO A DUMPSTER OR OTHER DISPOSAL CONTAINER. This could create an explosion hazard.

- Avoid cutting the tank with a torch or cutting wheel. Your cylinder may still contain propane and create a potential fire and explosion hazard.

- Always keep your propane cylinder stored upright until you can recycle or exchange it safely.

This fact sheet is a collaborative effort of the N.C. Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance and the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Standards Division. Portions of the information contained in this document are taken from “Disposal Of Grill Gas Cylinders” published by the NCDA&CS Standards Division. For recycling-related information, call DPPEA at (919) 715-6516 or e-mail nowaste@p2pays.org. If you have technical questions, please call NCDA&CS at (919) 733-3313, e-mail standards@ncmail.net, or go to http://www.ncstandards.org for the latest updates on propane tanks.

The N.C. Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance provides free, non-regulatory technical assistance and training on methods to eliminate, reduce or recycle wastes before they become pollutants or require disposal. Telephone DPPEA at (919) 715-6500 or (800) 763-0136 or e-mail nowaste@p2pays.org for assistance with issues in this fact sheet or any of your waste reduction concerns.