

PLAYING WITH FIRE: MOBILE LPG SAFETY IS NO LAUGHING MATTER



For many mobile and outdoor event caterers, LPG is the main source of power used for cooking, heating or powering generators. Making sure that LPG is safely used and stored is essential. Provided that it is handled correctly, LPG is safe to use. However, if it is handled poorly, LPG can cause substantial and potentially life-changing harm.

LPG cylinders are pressurised vessels that keep gas liquefied under air pressure. If the cylinders and/or connection systems are not correctly managed, the results can be disastrous causing major explosions or fires. Sadly, this is not just a theoretical possibility, as numerous LPG incidents have occurred over the years. These incidents have mostly occurred in outside catering units, particularly, gazebos and tented structures.

Although we are not the regulators, we have considered insight into the sector and feel

strongly that we can help to make positive changes by raising awareness, encouraging our members to follow the correct procedures and recommending engineers that are trusted to carry out gas installations and safety checks correctly.

When it comes to LPG, we all have a collective responsibility to keep things safe and uphold standards in order to promote best practice and safeguard the sector.

With regards to LPG regulations, the HSE stipulates that:

- Any work with gas appliances will be subject to the duties imposed by the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 (GSIUR).
- These Regulations require that all new appliances for commercial catering must be CE, UKCA or UKNI marked. CE, UKCA or UKNI marking indicates conformity with the Regulations and that a notified body has approved the appliance. Although the Regulations apply principally to domestic

appliances, industrial space heaters and commercial catering equipment are also covered. The principal standard that applies to safety standards for gas-fired catering equipment is BS EN 203-1.

- Everyone who does this type of work (installation and repair work on gas appliances) must be competent. Whether contractors or in-house staff do gas safety in catering and hospitality the work, the company or individual must be Gas Safe-registered and operatives must have valid certificates of competence relevant to the particular types of gas equipment and gas work they are involved with. This is a requirement of GSIUR.

We have been researching and understanding the challenges that the use or sometimes misuse of LPG brings. Some of these challenges are:

- A lack of LPG support and training for mobile traders, event organisers and Environmental Health Organisers (EHOs).
- A lack of industry consistency and interpretation of mobile LPG standards.
- The issuing of illegal gas certificates (a certificate issued by an engineer that works out of scope. For example, they may have the qualification for LPG, both domestic and commercial, but may not have the qualification for catering, or it could be an engineer that has the qualification for LPG commercial but not commercial mobile catering. Also, appliances which are not suitable, such as those without flame failure devices and even appliances designed for domestic use are signed off as safe to use.
- A shortage of qualified gas engineers – particularly those with competence in mobile LPG.
- Instances of unqualified persons carrying out fixes or repairs on gas appliances.
- The carrying out of poor or illegal practice with regards to the siting of LPG cylinders, equipment handling, unsuitable hosing, a lack of specific safety devices or use of incorrect hose clips.

With that being the case, it is clear that more needs to be done to raise the standards and ultimately ensure the safety of the industry for all those involved in it.

We asked our Gas Safety Consultant and qualified



MARC ROWSON
NCASS Gas Safety Consultant



LPG Engineer Marc Rowson for his thoughts on where the sectors sits when it comes to the use of LPG:

“The mobile catering industry through its diverse and often challenging set ups and installations has been subject to misinterpretation and application of standards and laws. Although there is satisfactory guidance and standards in place, often the knowledge of where to find this information is lacking, and not just by the engineer, but in the Gas industry, The Gas Safe Register and also the HSE.

The Liquid Gas UK Code of Practice 24-3 is a document that is approved by the Gas Safe Register as a formative document that is referred to in order to help traders achieve a suitable level of safety. The information contained within this document should an engineer follow, would ordinarily be doing enough to achieve a minimum standard of safety in certain scenarios and set ups. This is not the only document however and sometimes bespoke and specific appliances and set ups will require the excerpts and guidance from other documents to help achieve a satisfactory safety standard.

It is not always straight forward and there can be grey areas. That is why it is so important that traders, engineers, industry bodies and all sector stakeholders work together to reduce inconsistencies, misinterpretations and mistakes whilst always looking to improve standards with the overall use of LPG. As a sector, we must ensure that we are all doing all we can to safeguard this industry and most importantly keep the public safe.”

Mobile caterers that are busy trading throughout

the year, will be frequently setting up, taking down and transporting LPG appliances and cylinders, subjecting them to a lot of wear and tear and irregularities. It is therefore essential that the time is taken to carry out a series of simple and straightforward safety checks each time that they set up/take down. The LPG gas checklists provided by NCASS can support this process.

It is also vital that those all-important annual gas safety checks or repair works are carried out by a qualified Gas Safe Engineer who understands the unique requirements for LPG.

With mobile caterers frequently set up side by side, appliances and LPG cylinders are often in very close quarters with other combustible materials and ignition sources. Event organisers can do more to enhance their support for traders by facilitating safer setup, arranging optimal placement and spacing arrangement, and placing increased emphasis on incorporating gas safety measures into their overall event planning and on-site preparations.

EHOs who frequently enforce H&S standards within mobile catering are often unaware of what should be in place to ensure LPG set ups are safe and legal. Whilst often confident in the general gas safety standards they are less confident in the nuances relevant to LPG where ironically the risk of something going wrong can be higher. This is not surprising as few are given the chance to develop their understanding in these matters and are unable to access specific training and resources relevant to mobile LPG.

NCASS are not a governing body on this matter and are not looking to implement the laws ourselves – we are merely trying

to draw necessary attention to what we believe continues to be a significant issue. We aim to work with the relevant authorities and the wider sector to move forward in a cooperative and safer manner.

To do this, we have to try and remove the inconsistencies in standards, inspections and certifications. We believe it's unfair for engineers to follow varying standards or have different interpretations. This can result in scenarios where one engineer approves something that another engineer doesn't. This makes it impossible for traders to take responsibility and work to best practice. As an industry, we have to work together to do more and be better.

THE MOBILE LPG GAS SAFETY INITIATIVE

We recognise the challenges that the mobile catering sector faces, and how big a problem this could pose in terms of safety if not dealt with properly. Considering all the parties that this affects, we at NCASS have taken it upon ourselves to create a Mobile LPG Gas Safety Initiative. Work has begun to outline a roadmap to standardise gas safety within the industry.

The roadmap is broken into six key areas and sets out what we believe will be a five-year plan to bring safer gas usage to the sector. Rome wasn't built in a day, but beginning to build the foundations is an essential step to lay the path moving forward.

The aim is to increase the overall safety of everyone in the sector working with gas – both for caterers and their staff, and the general public. We want to involve the whole industry, which includes getting the gas suppliers on board. Ensuring that everybody is operating to safe standards will act to raise the profile of the industry. We are committed to leading

changes to make the use of LPG as safe as possible. In order to do this and bring about positive change, we are in continued discussions with the HSE, the Gas Safe Register, industry bodies and associations, LPG suppliers, gas engineers and traders to develop a safer future for LPG in our sector.

SO WHAT IS NCASS DOING?

Education is key when it comes to LPG safety:

- We are bringing a brand new LPG safety course online soon which outlines the relevant requirements and tips for mobile caterers to help them ensure their LPG set up is safe and legal. This course will be tiered so it is applicable for each sector of the audience, so it is simple and straightforward, making it suitable to follow, as it is appropriate for all involved in the use of LPG appliances.
- We are planning some key training workshops and sessions targeted towards event organisers. It is all about making people aware, and the more that people are aware across the spectrum of those involved in the hospitality sector with a specific focus on the events industry, the safer the industry can become.
- We will be developing a training package tailored towards EHOs and local authorities so they can more easily recognise substandard or improper LPG practices, this will help drive industry standards up which should lead to unsafe installations becoming the minority.

ENGINEERS:

- To improve member's access to qualified gas engineers and therefore improve LPG safety across the sector, we have established the NCASS approved Gas Engineer Partnerships (GEPs).
- The GEPs are trusted engineers who carry out gas installations and safety checks correctly. NCASS GEPs come with a raft of benefits and clear processes. They are Gas Safe engineers who work to the correct interpretations and high standards of LPG use and an agreed code of conduct. NCASS will allocate a GEP to our members based on their location, so they can be their first point of contact for anything related to the use of LPG. Through our gas safety consultants, NCASS will assess and interview all incoming Gas Engineer Partners to make sure they work to the correct high standards and necessary interpretations of LPG use. We offer the right resources and support to help them succeed and therefore help our members operate at a better level.
- NCASS have developed gas safety checklists that outline the correct guidance in conjunction with the Code of Practice (CoP) 24 standards for street food and mobile catering. These are specifically relevant to blue sky setups, gazebos, marquees, vehicles, trailers and wooden structures. These are designed to be followed by members when setting up their LPG appliances and the checks

are incorporated into the Daily Diary. The checklist provides a tool to enable members to assess the safety of their LPG.

- NCASS works with our Gas Safety Consultant, who is available to support members with technical queries that cannot be resolved by their own gas engineer and who supports us with the development of relevant resources and gas safety initiatives as outlined.

We have worked with gas experts and suppliers on LPG safety for many years now, however, as the sector grows and businesses diversify, it is now more important than ever for our sector to take steps to further improve LPG safety through self-governance.

We have highlighted concerns to the Health and Safety Executive and to Gas Safe. Following this up, we are challenging the reporting procedures Gas Safe currently employs and will continue to pursue regulatory bodies about implementing necessary reforms.

This is a collective effort. We all want the best for our industry, and raising LPG standards will certainly help bring that.

NCASS will continue to explore and highlight the challenges and solutions to our members and the wider hospitality and events industry and hold regular update meetings in the form of our Gas Safety Forum.

If you would like to talk to us about any of the points discussed, learn more about the planned services or make arrangements to enable better mobile LPG and gas safety awareness within your business, event or local authority, then please get in touch with us at:

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