

# **GOT GAS?**

## **The New Propane Tank**

### **Is your propane cylinder obsolete?**

Do you have a propane tank that was made before September 30, 1998? Well you might be in for a bit of a surprise the next time you go to fill it. As of April 1st, 2002 all new cylinders must be equipped with an Overfill Prevention Device (OPD). Also you can't get your old tank filled if it doesn't have this new valve. Don't worry, though, there are about 40 million obsolete cylinders out there now.

Every year it is estimated that there are 600 fires or explosions caused by overfilled propane cylinders. To eliminate this problem the National Fire Prevention Agency recommended to the Consumer Product Safety Commission that they require the OPD be installed on all propane tanks. So after years, here we are, scrambling to replace obsolete propane cylinders. This ruling applies to all propane cylinders from 4 to 40 pounds. So most any cylinders sold for gas grills are involved.

The OPD is a special valve that has a float inside the tank that will close the valve when the tank is 80% full. It won't measure how much propane is in the tank, but it is supposed to keep it from being overfilled. An overfilled propane tank can explode violently because of physical damage or exposure to moderate heat. Now, while the risk is relatively low, it is real.

So, how do you know if your tank needs to be replaced? The new propane cylinders have a triangle shaped valve knob. Older models had a five-prong, circular knob. If you have the triangle knob, then you're fine. Otherwise you need to get a new tank. Of course, you'll ask, why can't you just replace the valve? Any tank older than 12 years is considered too old to be used. And for those in the between years, the cost of replacing the valve is going to be about the same as exchanging the whole cylinder.

The cheapest way to replace your tank is through an exchange service like Blue Rhino. These services will exchange your empty, obsolete tank with a new, filled tank for an extra fee. A new (empty) tank can cost about \$25 to \$30. Old cylinders should be taken to a dealer or recycling center. Your local government can probably tell you where to take it. Some dealers may charge you a fee to take your old cylinder. You might also want to check with local hardware stores. Some stores are offering to replace your tank for you (at a fee of course).

Stores with tank exchange services are generally handling this in two ways.

1. Increasing the price of the tank exchange but accepting any tank as an exchange.  
(You pay a higher price every time, even if you have a new OPD tank.)
2. Keeping the same exchange price but charging an upgrade fee for old non-OPD tanks.  
(You pay a one-time price to upgrade only old tanks, but pay a lower price on all future refills.)

So, if you have one of the affected cylinders, make some calls and get it replaced before your next cookout. You don't want to be in the middle of *wienerizing* your grill and run out of gas.

# New Device Enhances Gas Grill Safety

## NEW "OPD" VALVE MANDATED FOR ALL SMALL PROPANE CYLINDERS

*OPD Valves required on all 4 – 40 LB Cylinders by April, 2002*

Now required by National Fire and Safety Standards, all new propane cylinders (sizes 4 lbs. to 40 lbs.) manufactured after October 1, 1998 are fitted with an Overflow Prevention Device. This new requirement most notably impacts users of Propane Gas Grills, which account for over 60 million grill tanks in use today. Overflow Prevention Device fitted valves are the result of extensive research into improving gas safety for you and your propane gas tanks. The new OPD valves prevent overfilling of propane cylinders, making filling and using propane cylinders safer than ever before. They are also compatible with your current gas appliances so it is easy to upgrade. Older style valves were more susceptible to overfilling which leaves no room for the liquid propane to expand. As a result gas may escape, creating a potentially hazardous situation. OPD valves solve this problem by using a special float (*shown below*) which rises during refilling to block the filling process when the tank is filled to the proper level.



### How It Works

1. Liquid propane (*dark blue in illustration at left*) fills the cylinder through the OPD valve.
2. At a safe level, the float cam (*yellow*) triggers the pin (*orange*) to fall into the recess of the cam, sealing this path off and preventing any more liquid propane from entering the cylinder.
3. The propane builds up pressure in the chamber (*center spring*) and pushes the piston arm up to form a seal, effectively stopping the filling process.
4. Using propane from the cylinder resets the OPD for the next fill.



## Its Easy to Identify the New OPD Valve

The new OPD valve is distinctive in several ways, both by its markings, and it's shape:

## What About Your Existing Cylinders?

An OPD type valve must be installed on your old cylinder. If your cylinder is inspected for requalification before April 1, 2002, an OPD-equipped valve will be installed at that time (All DOT cylinders require periodic requalification to ensure that they are safe for continued use). Even if your cylinder is not inspected for requalification before April 1, 2002, it must still have an OPD-equipped valve installed on it by that date.

## What happens if I don't have an OPD installed on my cylinder?

As of **April 1, 2002**, cylinders without OPDs cannot be refilled, by law.