

Behind the scenes at the WorkSafeBC video shoot at Salty's Lobster Shack.

Food trucks and propane safety

By Marnie Douglas

Starting a shift at a food truck? Ensure you know how to check your tank for leaks.

Food trucks are a popular alternative to opening a brick-and-mortar restaurant, but operators need to understand the risks of using propane to fuel cooking and appliances. Propane is a handy and portable fuel source, but it can cause an explosion if the fuel tank leaks and the propane builds up inside a truck and ignites.

Although an explosion is rare, owners and operators of food trucks should take precautions to reduce the risk of such a catastrophic event, which can result in severe burns or loss of life, notes Tim Pryde, an occupational health and safety consultant at WorkSafeBC who supports the hospitality and restaurant industry.

"It doesn't take much to ignite a propane leak. Your pilot light, stove tops, or sizzling oil could be a source of ignition. Any open flame can be a risk," he adds. "You must ensure that you have no leaks before operating anything propane-fuelled."

Safe work procedures

A good practice is to have a maintenance schedule and perform a soap test regularly. Any repairs must be done by an accredited gas fitter — not food truck staff — and the propane system should only be put back into service once the issues have been properly fixed.

Arturo Revuelta has owned and operated his Arturo's Mexico 2 Go food truck — complete with two 50-pound propane tanks — for 10 years in Vancouver. He says safe work practices like regularly checking the tanks and attachments help keep him and his employees safe.

"Every morning when we turn on the propane, we go through a checklist to make sure everything is working and there are no leaks," he says.

Safe travels

Food trucks by nature are often on the move. Before a food truck goes anywhere, the main valves should be shut off at the propane tank, the lines drained, and the propane tanks secured for travel. All propane tanks must be transported as per Transport Canada

guidelines — this means that food truck operators and staff must be familiar with the system requirements.

Because travel can cause vibration that can loosen or damage the propane system, staff should always check for warning signs when setting up at the final destination.

Ashton Phillips, owner/operator of Salty's Lobster Shack, says it's important to stay on top of general maintenance on food trucks, and particularly tires. "Tire safety is so important, but it may not be something that you think about every day. When you're travelling every day — and on the highways — tire safety and maintenance is essential, so give the tires a once-over every day."

Signs of a leak

Food truck owners and operators can use these "Safety talk" tips for a safety meeting with workers to improve their overall safety and reduce risks.

Propane sold commercially typically includes an odorant that smells like rotten eggs to help people nearby detect leaks. Warning signs of a leak in the propane system can include that smell of gas/rotten eggs; equipment that isn't working normally; or needing to fill the propane more often than normal.

Here are four steps to detecting and dealing with a leak:

- 1 **Soap it up.** Keep a spray bottle of water and a spray bottle of soapy water in the truck to test the propane tank connections whenever the tank is changed and when you're setting up at a new location. Make sure the main valve on the propane

tank is closed. Use the spray bottle to apply soapy water to the entire hose assembly, including the tank's valve and regulator. While you're soaping it up, look for damaged, corroded, or bent hoses where a leak could spring in the future.

- 2 **Pressurize.** Open the valve of the propane tank without turning on the appliances. This pressurizes the system. Be sure to check the entire line running from the propane cylinder valve to where the pipe attaches to your appliance. If you don't detect a leak, simply rinse off the assembly using the clean water spray bottle and let it drip dry.
- 3 **Watch for bubbles.** If there is a leak, bubbles will form at the leak site. And you might smell propane. If you notice the smell of propane or see bubbles, shut off the propane valve immediately. Shut it off from the main valve at the propane tank, not a downstream valve, in order to isolate the propane supply from the piping system.
- 4 **Have an emergency plan.** Do not use the system until the leak is fixed or the cylinder is replaced. If you continue to smell gas after you shut the main valve, you may have an uncontrolled leak from the main tank. Turn off and remove all ignition sources, evacuate the area, and call 911.

Check out the videos

These tips and more can be found in a video series about food truck safety on WorkSafeBC's website. Visit [worksafebc.com](https://www.worksafebc.com) and search "food truck and propane safety" to find the videos and additional resources for operating a food truck safely. 📺

**TOTAL SAFETY®** **TSS Total Safety Services Inc.®**

- Industrial Hygiene Services
- Hazardous Materials Surveys & Management
- Asbestos Laboratory Services

Contact Info:
O: 604.292.4700
#112-4595 Canada Way
Burnaby, BC V5G 1J9

Web:
pacificehs.totalsafety.com

**Health & Safety Centre**

Providing Province-wide
Education for Joint Occupational
Health & Safety Committees

OH&S Committee Part 1 & 2 • Investigations

- Improving Committee Effectiveness • Mental Health First Aid
- Bullying & Harassment • Mental Health & The CSA Standard Risk Assessments
- Ergonomics • Violence Prevention • Supervisor OH&S

Public schedule and course descriptions available at:
healthandsafetybc.ca  
In-house and Virtual training option available

\$155 per person
when registering 14 days in advance

Each 8 hr course satisfies Sec. 41 of the Workers Compensation Act
OH&S Committee Part 1 satisfies 3.27 Minimum training
requirements for new joint committee members

*funded by WorkSafeBC