



Propane

PROPANE at a Glance

Classification: Nonrenewable

U.S. Energy Production	1.80 Q	2.6 %
U.S. Energy Consumption	1.90 Q	1.9 %

Major Uses: industry, heating, transportation

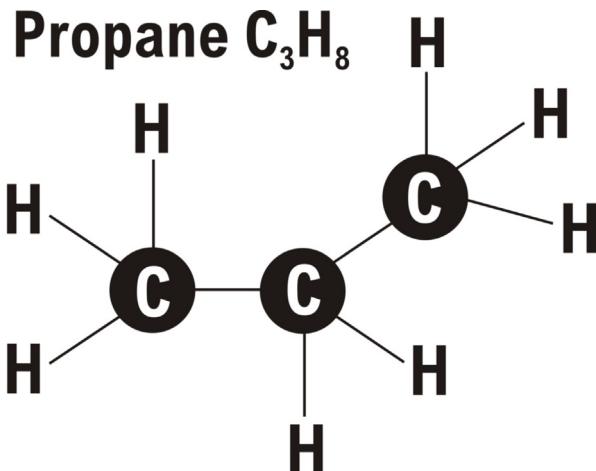
What Is Propane?

Propane is a gas derived from natural gas and petroleum. It is found mixed with natural gas and petroleum deposits. Propane is called a **fossil fuel** because it was formed millions of years ago from the remains of tiny sea animals and plants. When the plants and animals died, they sank to the bottom of the oceans and were buried by layers of sediment and sand that turned into rock. Over time, the layers became thousands of feet thick.

The layers were subjected to enormous heat and pressure, changing the energy-rich remains into petroleum and natural gas deposits. Eventually, pockets of these fossil fuels became trapped in rocks, much as a wet sponge holds water.

Propane is one of the many fossil fuels included in the **liquefied petroleum (LP)** gas family. Because propane is the type of LP-gas most commonly used in the United States, propane and LP-gas are often used synonymously. Butane is another LP-gas often used in lighters. The chemical formula for propane is C_3H_8 .

Just as water can change its physical state and become a liquid or a gas (steam vapor), so can propane. Under normal atmospheric pressure and temperature, propane is a gas. Under moderate pressure and/or lower temperatures, however, propane changes into a liquid. Propane is easily stored as a liquid in pressurized tanks. Think of the small tanks you see attached to a gas barbecue grill, for example.

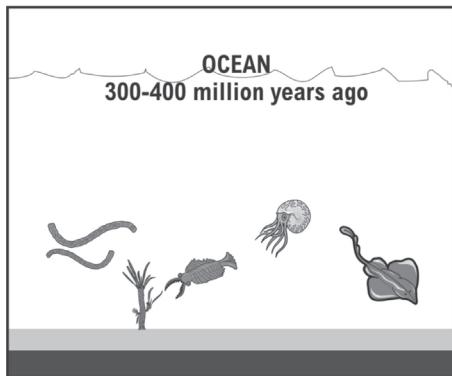


Propane takes up much less space in its liquid form. It is 270 times more compact in its liquid state than it is as a gas. A thousand gallon tank holding gaseous propane would provide a family enough cooking fuel for one week. A thousand gallon tank holding liquid propane would provide enough cooking fuel for more than five years!

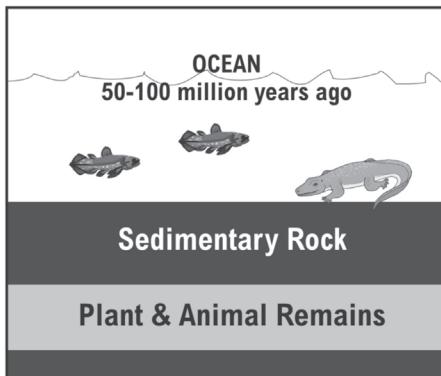
When propane vapor (gas) is drawn from a tank, some of the liquid in the tank instantly vaporizes to replace the vapor that was removed. Propane is nicknamed the portable gas because it is easier to store and transport than natural gas, which requires pipelines.

Like natural gas, propane is colorless and odorless. An odorant called mercaptan is added to propane (as it is to natural gas) to serve as a warning agent for escaping gas. And, like all fossil fuels, propane is a **nonrenewable** energy source. We can't make more propane in a short period of time.

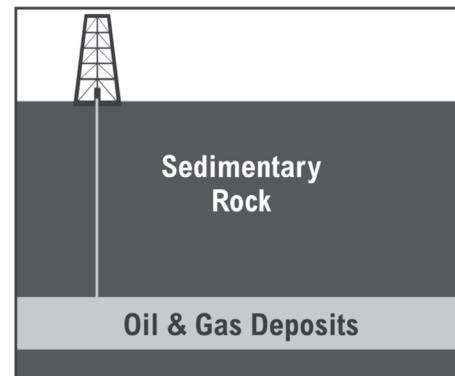
OIL & NATURAL GAS FORMATION



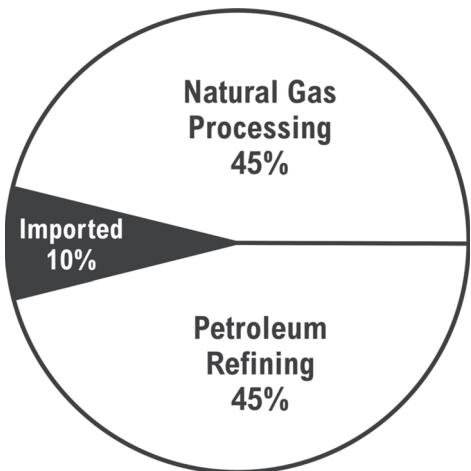
Tiny sea plants and animals died and were buried on the ocean floor. Over time, they were covered by layers of sedimentary rock.



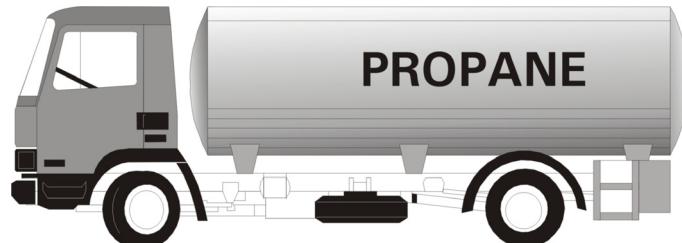
Over millions of years, the remains were buried deeper and deeper. The enormous heat and pressure turned them into oil and gas.



Today, we drill down through layers of sedimentary rock to reach the rock formations that contain oil and gas deposits.



Sources of U.S. Propane



Bobtail trucks can carry 1,000-3,000 gallons of liquid propane to local distributors.

History of Propane

Propane does not have a long history. It wasn't discovered until 1912 when people were trying to find a way to store gasoline. The problem with gasoline was that it evaporated when stored under normal conditions.

Dr. Walter Snelling, directing a series of experiments for the U.S. Bureau of Mines, discovered that several evaporating gases could be changed into liquids and stored at moderate pressure. The most plentiful of those gases was propane. Dr. Snelling developed a way to bottle the liquid gas. One year later, the propane industry began heating American homes. By 1915, propane was being used in torches to cut through metal.

Producing Propane

Propane comes from natural gas and petroleum wells. Forty-five percent of the propane used in the United States is extracted from raw natural gas. Raw natural gas contains about 90 percent methane, five percent propane, and five percent other gases. The propane is separated from the raw natural gas and the other gases at a natural gas processing plant.

Forty-five percent of the propane is extracted from crude petroleum. Petroleum is separated into its various products at a processing plant called a refinery. The other ten percent of the propane we use in the U.S. is imported from other countries, mostly from Canada and Mexico.

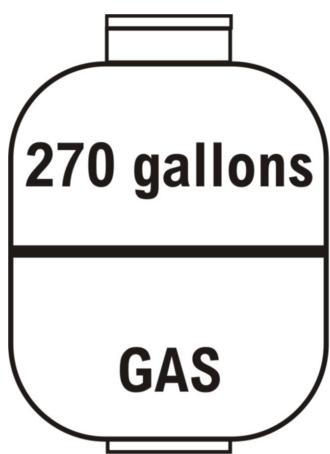
Transporting Propane

How does propane get from natural gas processing plants and oil refineries to the consumer? Usually, propane first moves through underground pipelines to distribution terminals across the nation. There are about 70,000 miles of pipeline in the United States moving propane to 13,500 bulk storage and distribution terminals.

Distribution terminals, which are operated by propane companies, function like warehouses that store merchandise before shipping it to stores and shops. Sometimes, especially in the summer when less energy is needed for heating, propane is stored in large underground storage caverns.

After storage at distribution terminals, propane is transported by railroad tank cars, transport trucks, barges, and tanker ships to bulk plants. A **bulk plant** is where local propane dealers fill their small tank trucks, called bobtails.

People who use very little propane—backyard barbecuers, for example—must bring their propane cylinders to a dealer to be filled. There are about 165,000 propane dealers, such as hardware stores and gas stations, in the U.S. today.



+ Pressure →

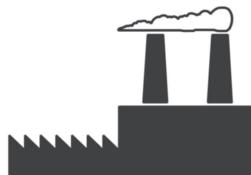




How Propane is Used



To heat barns and operate farm equipment



To make products and fuel industry



To fuel hot air balloons



To fuel machinery that is used indoors



To fuel backyard grills



To heat homes



To fuel fleet vehicles



To fuel appliances

How Propane Is Used

Propane is a clean-burning, versatile fuel. It is used by nearly everyone in the United States—in homes, on farms, by business, and in industry—mostly for producing heat and operating equipment.

Homes

Homes and businesses use about one-third of the propane consumed in the U.S. Propane is used mostly in homes in rural areas that do not have natural gas service, as well as in manufactured (mobile) homes. More than 14 million households use propane to meet some of their energy needs. Nearly a million households use propane as their main heating source. About one-fourth of mobile homes use propane for heating.

Propane is also used in homes for air conditioning, heating water, cooking and refrigerating foods, drying clothes, lighting, and fueling fireplaces.

Homes that use propane as a main energy source usually have a large propane tank outside of the house that stores propane under pressure as a liquid.

Propane dealers deliver propane to the residences in trucks, filling the tanks several times a year as needed. The average residential propane tank holds between 500–1,000 gallons of liquid fuel.

Millions of backyard cooks use propane-powered gas grills for cooking. And recreational vehicles (RV's) usually have propane-fueled appliances, giving them a portable source of energy for cooking, hot water, and refrigeration.

Farms

Half of America's farms—nearly 700,000—use propane to help meet their energy needs. Farmers use propane to dry crops such as corn, soybeans, grains, tobacco, apples, peanuts, and onions. Propane is also used to ripen fruit, heat water, and refrigerate foods.

Propane flamethrowers are used to control weeds. Propane is also used to heat barns, chicken houses, stock tanks, nurseries, greenhouses, orchards, and incubators.

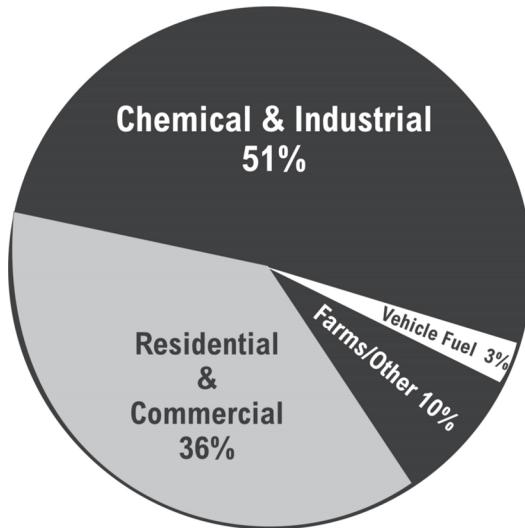
Propane is one fuel farmers use to operate a variety of farm equipment, including tractors, weeders, irrigation pumps, standby generators, and seedling planters.

Business

More than one million business and commercial establishments—such as hotels, schools, hospitals, restaurants, and laundromats—use propane for heating and cooling air, cooking and refrigerating food, heating water, and lighting.



PROPANE CONSUMPTION



Industry

Industry uses more than half of the propane consumed in the U.S. Some industries find propane well suited to their special needs. Metal workers use propane tanks to fuel their cutting torches and other equipment. Industries also use propane for soldering, vulcanizing, and other processes that need a ready heat source. More than 350,000 industrial sites use propane as fuel.

Portable propane heaters provide a convenient source of heat for construction and road workers in cold weather. Propane also is used to heat asphalt for highway construction and repairs. Propane heaters at construction sites are used to dry concrete, plaster, and fuel pitch. And because propane is a very low-emission fuel, forklift trucks powered by propane can operate safely inside factories and warehouses.

Propane is also a valuable feedstock for the chemical industry. About one-third of the propane used today is as a raw material for making plastic bags and other products.



Propane Today

The United States uses more propane gas than any other country in the world. Propane supplies 1.9 percent of our total energy needs and ranks as the seventh most important energy source.

About 90 percent of the propane used in this country is produced in the United States from petroleum and natural gas but, since we import two-thirds of the petroleum we use, more than 30 percent of the propane we produce here is made from imported fuel.

Propane and the Environment

Propane is a very clean burning fossil fuel, which explains its use in indoor settings. It has been approved as an alternative fuel under the Clean Air Act, as well as the **National Energy Policy Act of 1992**.



A delivery truck that runs on propane fuel.

PROPANE as a Transportation Fuel

Did you know that propane has been used as a transportation fuel for more than half a century? Taxicab companies, government agencies, and school districts often use propane, instead of gasoline, to fuel their fleets of vehicles. Today, about three percent of total propane consumption is used for transportation.

There are some interesting characteristics about propane that make it an ideal engine fuel. First, propane is cleaner burning than gasoline. Propane leaves no lead, varnish, or carbon deposits that cause the premature wearing of pistons, rings, valves, and spark plugs. The engine stays clean, free of carbon and sludge. This means less maintenance and an extended engine life.

Also, propane is all fuel. It doesn't require the additives that are usually blended into gasoline. Even without additive boosters, propane's octane rating of 110 is equal to and, in most cases, higher than available gasoline.

Propane-fueled engines produce less air pollution than gasoline engines. Carbon monoxide emissions from engines using propane are 50 to 92 percent lower than emissions from gasoline-fueled engines. Hydrocarbon emissions are 30 to 62 percent lower.

So why isn't propane used as a transportation fuel more often? For one reason, propane is not as conveniently available as gasoline. Second, an automobile engine has to be adjusted to use propane fuel, and the cost of converting an engine to use propane is often prohibitive. Third, there is a slight drop in miles per gallon when propane is used to fuel vehicles.