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Michigan propane shortage: Supplies improving but still tight as Snyder directs agencies to assist residents

Consumers advised to use supplies wisely, seek assistance, take precautions

LANSING, Mich. - Gov. Rick Snyder is directing state agencies to reach out to consumers affected by the ongoing propane shortage, which has eased slightly though supplies remain tight. The state is working to alleviate supply problems while continually monitoring the situation.

“The state is working diligently to help improve the propane shortage situation,” Snyder said. “The health and safety of our residents is most important, and I’ve directed relevant agencies to work with those who have been affected by the shortage and offer assistance and available resources until propane levels are restored.”

Michigan is one of more than 30 states to declare a propane energy emergency, and Snyder said he would issue another executive order on Friday to extend an exemption for motor carriers and drivers transporting propane and heating oil within Michigan from hours-of-service regulations and requirements until Feb. 11. The governor issued similar executive orders in December and early January to help service residents with available supply as quickly as possible.

Record low temperatures, heavy snowfall and poor driving conditions, combined with pipeline issues and other factors have all contributed to Michigan’s propane shortage.

The state has been working closely with the propane gas industry to resolve the supply chain issues, and this week supplies in the Upper Peninsula improved slightly as a facility in Rapid River went back online after supplies from Wisconsin were halted for new pump installation. However, propane inventories in the region are down 46 percent from last year’s levels, and are expected to remain tight.

With the low temperatures and shortage in propane, Snyder is also concerned about seniors and people with disabilities both at home and in nursing homes. It’s important for older adults to take extra precautions to keep warm, avoid carbon monoxide poisoning, and to seek assistance for heating their homes. Snyder said multiple state agencies have mobilized to assist Michiganders, particularly those who are more susceptible to the low temperatures:

Supporting propane supply

The governor’s administration will request an extension of an emergency declaration for Midwestern states by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration beyond the current

expiration date of Feb. 11, allowing for the continuation of state's hours of service waivers for motor carrier drivers transporting propane.

The administration will also request assistance from the U.S. Department of Transportation for coordination of weight restriction exemptions between states during the shortage to insure that interstate transport of propane is not unnecessarily impeded and to continue to extend the waiver of the Hours of Service for truck drivers hauling propane.

The Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) is also monitoring the state's propane supply and is leading an effort with other affected states to monitor and coordinate responses. The commission also offers tips for consumers on how to [reduce usage](#).

Heating assistance

The Department of Human Services oversees the Michigan Energy Assistance Program (MEAP), and encourages customers to dial 211 to obtain information about the closest MEAP grantees, who can provide qualifying people with direct bill assistance. Customers can also apply for State Emergency Relief at local department offices or online at any time by clicking the Apply for Benefits link at www.mibridges.michigan.gov.

The MPSC also provides information on [available energy assistance](#), and offers information on a [home heating credit](#) that is available to low income customers.

Pricing concerns and complaints

Attorney General Bill Schuette encouraged customers who are concerned about possible price gouging to contact the Consumer Protection Division at 1-877-765-8388 or file an online complaint at www.michigan.gov/ag.

Schuette said his office monitors propane prices closely and will act when necessary.

“Michigan families struggling with rising heating costs and the bitter cold should not have to worry about whether they are paying a fair price for propane,” said Schuette. “These circumstances are not a free pass for price gouging. We are monitoring propane prices closely, and we will not hesitate to take action if evidence of price gouging surfaces.”

Alternative heating source safety

The Department of Community Health cautioned residents who use alternative sources for heat, including generators and other gasoline or charcoal burning devices, to never use them inside homes, basements, garages or near a window. These appliances give off deadly carbon monoxide fumes, which are colorless, odorless, and can build up quickly in a home. Early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning may include headache, dizziness, confusion, fatigue, and nausea. As more of this gas is inhaled, it can cause unconsciousness, brain damage and even death. If carbon monoxide poisoning is suspected, get fresh air immediately and call 911. For more information about carbon monoxide poisoning and poisoning prevention, visit www.michigan.gov/carbonmonoxide.

The MPSC also has recommendations for [safely using supplemental heating](#).

Emergency preparedness

The Michigan State Police Emergency Management and Homeland Security Division also provides information about being prepared before, during and after an emergency or disaster, at www.michigan.gov/beprepared.

Nine percent of Michigan households use propane as the primary space heating fuel. Michigan ranks highest nationally in residential propane consumption and is in the top 10 for overall use, according to the Energy Information Administration.

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