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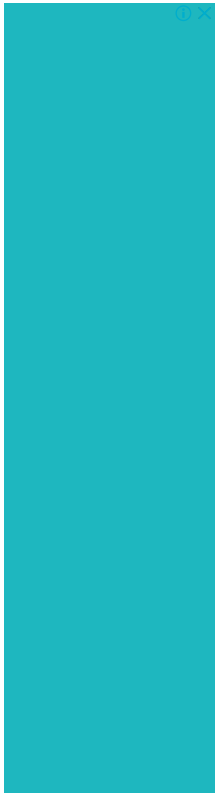
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Liquefied Petroleum Gas bottling plants - solution to high-risk dispensing stations

Date: Jan 18 , 2017 , 01:06

BY: Isaac Simpson

Category: Opinion



Customers buying LPG at a gas filling station

The recent fire outbreak at a Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) dispensing station at La is a wake-up call for the authorities to come out with permanent solutions to prevent future occurrences.



It was reported that nine people died and several others sustained various degrees of burns in the incident. This is not the first time such an incident has happened.

The Engas Filling station incident at Asokwa in Kumasi in 2007 and the Dansoman incident which claimed two lives about 19 months ago are examples.

Again, in 2014 an LPG tanker caught fire at Kwahu Fodua Zongo, killing a number of people and destroying property worth thousands of Ghana cedis.



There have been various incidents which could have resulted in fatalities if the escaped LPG had ignited. However, the timely intervention of the Ghana National Fire Service averted such incidents.

Some of these incidents were the transfer of LPG from a tanker which was leaking into another tanker at Gomoa Budumburam, leakage of LPG at a dispensing station at Inchaban and the LPG tanker accident at Tetegu junction in 2016.

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Ten years after the Engas Filling station at Asokwa in Kumasi incident, nothing has been done to change the way LPG consumers get the commodity. We are still buying LPG at dispensing stations. The safety of life and property is a major concern to many people because of where majority of these stations are sited.

How it used to be

The exchange of an empty cylinder for an already filled one was the practice in the 1960s and 1970s. Expatriates and few households who were using LPG for cooking bought LPG by taking their empty cylinders to petrol filling stations such as the British Petroleum (BP), AGIP and Mobil for already filled cylinders. There were no LPG dispensing stations.

The situation changed when many households started using LPG as an alternative and cheaper fuel for cooking. This was the result of government's campaign in the late 1980s on the use of LPG stoves; a measure aimed at reducing the fast depletion of our forest due to the cutting of trees for firewood and charcoal.



The high demand of LPG by households and other commercial users resulted in individuals setting up LPG dispensing stations with approval from the appropriate state institutions to sell the product to consumers. Now there are LPG dispensing stations in every corner and consumers do not need to travel long distances to buy LPG.

Concerns

Some of these stations are sited in places where residents have raised concern about their safety in the event of a fire outbreak because Ghanaians have witnessed fatalities of LPG fires in recent times. In addition, most of these stations have poor safety practices, inadequate safety training for personnel, lack of standard operating procedures as well as poor periodic maintenance works.

It is clear that there was no long-term plan on how LPG consumers would get the product to buy without creating hazardous conditions for them and the environment when the campaign was launched for households to change from using charcoal and firewood to LPG stoves.

The debate on safe transportation of LPG by tankers, as well as operations of LPG dispensing stations, will continue because we do not have in place a system where LPG consumers will take their empty cylinders to a point of sale/vendors for already filled ones as practiced in La Cote d'Ivoire.

This arrangement will require the setting up of LPG bottling plants. An oil marketing company is already constructing such facility which may come into operation very soon.

Once in operation and vendors/fuel retailing stations are selling LPG in already filled cylinders, the risk associated with the transportation of LPG by road will reduce and we will also see a gradual reduction of the number of people who go to LPG dispensing stations to fill their cylinders.

Recommendation

Consumers will prefer to go and exchange their empty cylinders with a filled one at fuel retailing stations/vendors rather than taking an empty cylinder to LPG dispensing stations where the risk of fire is high. The problem will not be solved overnight but gradually we will get there.

Regarding vehicles that use LPG, oil marketing companies should consider adding LPG dispensers at petrol filling stations as pertains in other jurisdictions.

There should be a long-term plan backed by law to gradually phase out LPG dispensing stations and in their place establish vendors/fuel retail stations to sell already bottled LPG. LPG dispensing stations, irrespective of high standard operating procedures, cannot be risk-proof because human errors such as reported as the cause of the Labadi accident may result in fire outbreak leading to injuries, death and destruction of property.

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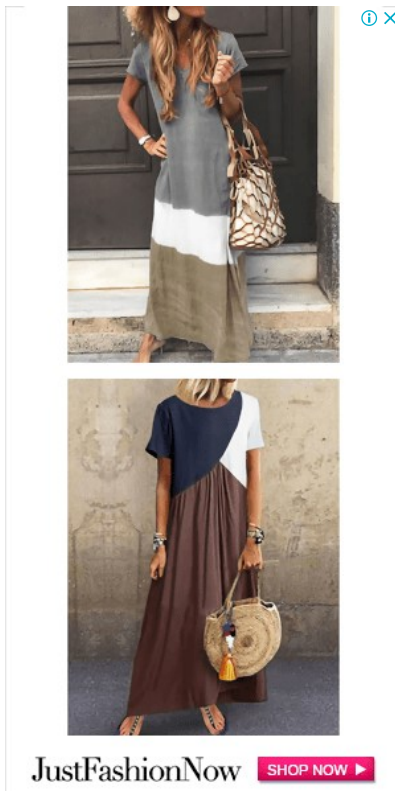
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