

The sale and delivery of oil and gas

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This guidance is for England, Scotland and Wales

There are legal controls concerning the selling and delivery of oil (consisting primarily of diesel and kerosene), butane and propane gas. Oil and gas must be accurately measured or weighed, and a ticket given to the customer indicating the quantity delivered.

How is oil measured?

Oil sold in bulk is measured by the litre using a bulk fuel road tanker equipped with either:

- a calibrated meter
... or
- using a dipstick (once a popular method of measurement, now hardly used)

Meter deliveries

Oil is pumped from a compartment on the delivery tanker through a meter that has been tested for accuracy and sealed. From there the oil flows to the tank. Each meter has a ticket-printing mechanism, which must be at zero before each delivery. There is often a minimum delivery associated with road tanker metering systems, typically 500 litres, but can be less depending on the tanker. Metering systems for the measurement of fuels are 'in use for trade' and controlled by weights and measures legislation that contains the limits of error within which they must measure fuels. If you operate road tankers with metering systems, it is good practice to ensure that the meters are periodically tested for accuracy and that the seals protecting the security of the measuring system are regularly inspected and remain intact.

Contact your local trading standards service if you require further information.

It is normal practice to 'dip' the customer's tank before delivery commences to ensure that the amount of fuel ordered can be accommodated by the tank. This will avoid overfilling the tank that could result in fuel loss and potential environmental contamination.

Dipstick deliveries

Every compartment on the tanker has a number and its own numbered dipstick marked with graduations and quantities.

Measurement is made by 'dipping' the compartment before the delivery and noting how much oil is in the compartment, then 'dipping' again afterwards, seeing how much remains, and working out how much has been delivered.

How is gas measured?

Gas in bulk

Bulk propane - or liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) as it is also known - is measured by the litre and, like heating oil, if destined for domestic use is delivered by road tanker. The meter used to measure the fuel, as it goes from tanker to storage tank, is periodically calibrated and sealed to prevent unauthorised access. Each meter is fitted with a ticket printer. Some meters are fitted with electronic meter heads and the printer for this system may be located in the driver's cab.

Propane / LPG meters are not controlled by weights and measures legislation so there are no associated legal limits of error. However, the equipment is 'in use for trade' as it measures product for which payment is made and its performance in terms of accuracy should be comparable with road-tanker metering systems that operate to +/- 0.5% of the quantity delivered.

Operators of road tankers delivering propane / LPG may be members of Liquid Gas UK (the trade association for the LPG and bioLPG industry in the UK).

The website contains an extensive list of publications on the use and storage of LPG.

Bottled gas

Bottled gas is sold by reference to the net weight of the contents (in kilograms), which should be clearly marked on the cylinder (and should also say 'butane' or 'propane').

The bottling plant where the cylinders are filled must use accurate weighing or measuring equipment that has been checked and tested to ensure accuracy.

Net weight = the weight full (gross weight) minus the weight of the container when empty (tare weight). The empty (tare) weight is normally on the neck or rim of the cylinder or on a permanent label.

Storage conditions

You should consider the hazards of storing oil and gas, as both are highly flammable. Your obligations differ depending upon whether you are storing as a business or consumer. If in doubt, contact the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Trade associations

Liquid Gas UK is the trade body for the LPG and bioLPG industry and the Oil Firing Technical Association (OFTEC) is the trade body for the heating oil industry.

Other legislation

The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 make it an offence to give any false or misleading statements about the price charged and descriptions applied to goods. For example, claiming heating oil or bottled gas have particular properties, such as efficiency, cleanliness or heating properties that cannot be substantiated, are false or misleading.

Please see 'Consumer protection from unfair trading' for more information on the Regulations.

Contracts between traders and consumers are also controlled by the Consumer Rights Act 2015. The Act requires that goods and services provided by traders to consumers should be in accordance with the contract, provided with reasonable care and skill, at a reasonable price, etc. It also provides consumers with remedies they can require from the trader if goods and services provided do not meet the terms of the contract; these remedies include a reduction in the price paid.

Under the Consumer Rights Act 2015 heating oil and bottled gas supplied to consumers should be:

- of satisfactory quality (for example, it should burn correctly)
- fit for purpose (for example, it should be compatible with any appliances for which it is specified; it must also be fit for any specific or particular purpose the consumer makes known to the merchant)
- as described (for example, if it is described as being a particular brand or having particular combustion properties or other features, etc, that is what should be delivered to the consumer)

See 'The sale and supply of goods' for detailed information on the Consumer Rights Act.

Where specific legal requirements, such as those detailed earlier in this guide, impose stricter duties and requirements on traders they take precedence and must be complied with.

Trading standards

For more information on the work of trading standards services - and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law - please see 'Trading standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

Key legislation

Weights and Measures Act 1985

Measuring Instruments Regulations 2016

Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008
Consumer Rights Act 2015

Last reviewed / updated: June 2020

In this update

Advice about checking seals added

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links may only show the original version of the legislation, although some amending legislation is linked to separately where it is directly related to the content of a guide. Information on amendments to legislation can be found on each link's 'More Resources' tab.

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