

# The RV Propane System: What the Pros Do (Or should be doing!)

Throughout many of my RV owner articles and training seminars, I make frequent reference to this declaration: *“Do not attempt this yourself. Only allow certified or master certified RV service technicians to work on your \_\_\_\_\_”* (fill in the blank). I’m simply implying that certain tasks should be left to the professionals.



by Gary Bunzer, the RV Doctor

There are some procedures, processes and practices that even the most experienced RV owner should never attempt. In most cases, it is in regard to the need of specialty equipment or high-dollar diagnostic test devices or support literature (schematic wiring diagrams

and product service bulletins for instance), which I’m sure most RV owners would not possess. In other instances, it is because specific training is required since some tasks are a challenge even for veteran service techs until hands-on practice or repetition breeds continued success.

Am I stating that certified RV service technicians are perfect because they are certified? That they will be able to diagnose and repair the RV and get you back on the road in the fastest amount of time, job complete, without fail, every time? Absolutely not! But I can tell you this—you stand a much better chance knowing that a given technician has completed some type of training and has passed a

rigorous exam, or worked his/her way through five specialty areas (successfully passing six different exams) to obtain RV Industry certification, and has continually earned forty recertification points every five years. More so, at least, than the guy over at Joe Blow’s RV Service Shop, who hung out his shingle because his brother once owned a folding camping trailer! (My apologies to anyone owning a real business called Joe Blow’s RV Service Shop!). But I sincerely hope you get my point. The first question I encourage RVers to ask when visiting an unfamiliar repair shop or dealership during their travels is, “Do you have any master certified technicians working here?” The odds are in your favor, always, by

taking your recreational investment to a certified technician for professional troubleshooting and repair!

RV Industry technician certification is a joint effort developed, supported and endorsed by RVIA, the RV Industry Association (a trade group representing over 90% of all RV manufacturers) and RVDA, the RV Dealers Association (representing a nationwide network of selling dealerships). Both associations have committed to developing ongoing service technician training programs and are the only agencies authorized to “certify” technicians. Independent RV training schools may also do their own “certifying,” but it’s the RVIA-RVDA patch that really matters.

## The RV Propane Gas System

One area where my aforementioned admonition is paramount is with the RV propane system—the system in general, as well as the internal happenings inside the propane appliances. That said, there are many RV-owner-type propane preventive maintenance tasks you can perform with a little knowledge

and common sense. In the past I’ve written extensively regarding the RV furnace, water heater and refrigerator. The one common denominator regarding all four of the propane-burning appliances, common to the vast majority of recreation vehicles, is the main propane pressure regulator.

## How can it be determined, with 100% certainty, that a given RV propane system is leak-free?

I often state the importance of the pressure regulator and that only certified technicians be allowed to make adjustments to the operating line pressure. There are a couple other tests associated with the regulator that should also be performed annually. Specialty equipment is

also required. The reason? It is impossible to adjust the regulator by simply looking at a burner flame. Small incremental adjustments in the operating pressure will manifest no visible flame differentiation at any given burner. It cannot be detected by the eye; it must be measured.

That said, I do believe it’s important for RV owners to understand why the three pressure regulator tests and measurements are mandated. Such as, why is the delivery pressure set to 11.0 inches of water column? What is regulator lock-up? And, how can it be determined, with 100% certainty, that a given RV propane system is leak-free? Or conversely, how to know with 100% certainty that leaks are indeed present somewhere in the system? And what to do to locate and rectify them?

## Lock-up Pressure

All propane appliances manufactured for RV use are designed to operate at a delivery line pressure between 10 and 14 inches of water column. Appliance



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