



Making the Right Choice in Beverage Gas

INTRODUCTION

Beverage dispense gas is seldom at the forefront of hospitality managers' minds, but the desire to reduce costs in challenging economic times is an ongoing concern. The need to cut costs has driven many licensees to source the gas for beverage dispensers from cheaper alternative sources and there has been a subsequent rise in "rogue" and illicit beverage gas fillers/suppliers. This document sets out the dangers of using a "back-of-the-van", or illicit, gas cylinder supplier and gives hospitality managers guidelines regarding how to spot good and bad gas cylinders.

THE PRESSURES OF PROFIT

In the current economy, licensees and hospitality managers are under immense pressure to curtail costs. There are several reputable nationwide and regional beverage gas suppliers around the country and most are reputable gas suppliers but some are not. Those hospitality establishments that have changed to the cheaper "back-of-the-van" gas cylinder traders to save money may enjoy a small saving, but at what cost to the business, product quality and safety? The purchase of illicit beverage gas cylinders is a false economy for the following reasons:

- One standard cylinder of gas can dispense up to ten kegs of beer holding eleven gallons each, therefore, a tainted gas cylinder can ruin 880 pints of beer!
- Customers know when a pint of beer or a drink made with tainted beverage gas tastes wrong. Can the business afford to lose their custom?
- Beer suppliers will refuse to pay compensation for the loss of beer caused by the use of non-food grade dispense gas. The business will be out-of-pocket for the cost of the tainted drinks and the gas cylinder.
- Use of illicit gas means the hospitality business will be at risk of prosecution for breaching several laws including:
 - Health and Safety at Work Act
 - Food Regulations
 - Carriage of Dangerous Goods (CDG) Regulations
- An illicit gas cylinder can be, literally and figuratively, a time bomb. It can explode, damaging the premises and possibly killing or maiming staff and customers. According to the Health & Safety Executive, "[b]etween 2000 and 2003 there were eight failures of mixed beverage gas cylinders at cylinder filling premises, in clubs and pubs, and at a training centre and a warehouse." (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/safetybulletins/mixedgascylinders.htm>)

GOOD DISPENSE GAS

Good dispense gas is supplied in a cylinder that is “in test” and in good condition, filled with food grade gas only and correctly labelled to ensure it meets all legislation and safety requirements. Good gas is essential to serving quality drinks in the way the producer intended.

BAD DISPENSE GAS

Bad dispense gas may be supplied by rogue traders. It is often in stolen gas cylinders, in poor condition, not tested, lacks the necessary formal labelling, is most likely filled with industrial grade gas of poor quality and is potentially contaminated. Some bad gas cylinders are filled only with compressed air and do not contain any type of dispense gas! Bad dispense gas clearly has a marked effect on the quality of the business’s beverages.

THE DANGERS OF BAD DISPENSE GAS

Cylinders like the one pictured on the left-hand side of the photograph (right) have exploded in cellars causing immense damage and personal injury. Bad gas cylinders are also more likely to leak causing an increase in the level of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the cellar creating a non-breathable, toxic atmosphere. Carbon dioxide is odourless and without colour, but it is a lethal killer when released into a confined space.



MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE: GOOD DISPENSE GAS CYLINDERS

There is essential information contained on the product label of good gas cylinders. By law, all dispense gas cylinders must clearly display a label covering the following information:

- Product identity – a statement disclosing what gas is held in the cylinder
- An emergency contact telephone number is provided
- Risk and safety phrases – such as “compressed” - are used on the cylinder
- The suppliers name is included
- A hazard warning diamond is visible




A sample label for a good beverage gas cylinder.

FOOD TRACEABILITY LABEL



















By law, all gas cylinders supplied for the drinks trade must have a product traceability label on the gas cylinder, valve or valve guard. This is typically a small label added to the cylinder with a series of numbers and letters; some cylinders are even bar coded. The label is used to trace the cylinder and its contents in the event of any quality issues. Reputable suppliers change the labels at every fill. Do not use any dispense gas cylinders that are missing a traceability or product label.

TEST DATE RINGS

By law, all gas cylinders are subjected to regular testing and inspection to ensure the integrity of the gas cylinder. The testing ensures the cylinder is safe to be used at the required pressure and identifies when a gas cylinder is due for a retest through the use of a plastic ring fitted around the neck of the valve which has a specific colour and shape designating when that particular cylinder is due for inspection. See the chart below for valid test rings.

British Compressed Gases Association 

Test Rings - these indicate the year that your cylinder must be retested by law

					
2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
					
2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
					
2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024

The test ring shapes and colours follow an 18 year rotation as shown above, which will help guide customers on when testing is next due.

ROGUE TRADERS AND ILLICIT OPERATORS

Rogue traders and illicitly filled drinks dispense gas cylinders will NOT:

- Display the correct labelling and safety information.
- Use food traceability labels as they don't want you to know where the gas cylinder and its contents have come from.
- Have been tested and are therefore highly likely to be missing the test date rings, this makes the gas cylinder a potentially dangerous item to have in your cellar, a time bomb waiting to happen.

DISPENSE GAS CHECKLIST

Hospitality managers and licensees can make the safe and sensible choice by using the following short checklist to identify cylinders that are safe to use. You should be able to answer "YES" to all of the questions. A "NO" answer may indicate that the cylinder is unsafe to use and should not be accepted.

- Are the cylinder's contents clearly identified on the cylinder's label?
- Is the product traceability label visible?
- Is there a current coloured plastic test date ring between the valve and the cylinder?
- Have you been supplied with separate product safety data sheets?
- Is the cylinder valve sealed when delivered?
- Does the cylinder look in good condition, i.e. No excessive rust, dents, gouges, bulges, or defacing of any kind?

CONCLUSION

Bad dispense gas from a rogue, illicitly operating supplier will cost the business money, affect the business's custom and reputation by tainting beer and drinks, and – more importantly - can pose a serious safety risk to the business, its staff and customers. If you see or have been offered bad dispense gas then you should contact the BFBi Drinks Gas Hotline on +44 (0)1902 795743. Further information is available from the following websites.

www.bcgga.co.uk and www.bfbi.org.uk/press and www.beerandpub.com/press

This guide has been produced by the Institute of Hospitality with the British Compressed Gases Association (BCGA) and industry peers the Brewing, Food & Beverage Industry Suppliers Association (BFBi) and the British Beer and Pub Association. In association with this document there is an information leaflet for licensees called "L10" or "Profit Through Quality – Good Gas, Good Business: Revision 2: 2008". L10 is available free to download at the BCGA website: <http://www.bcgga.co.uk/preview/products.php?q1=440e8a>. The L10 leaflet was created by several organisations including the BCGA, BFBi, BBPA and a number of reputable gas companies to create a definitive guide on identifying illicitly filled gas cylinders.



British Compressed Gases Association
www.BCGA.co.uk



Brewing, Food & Beverage Industry Suppliers Association
www.bfbi.org.uk



British Beer & Pub Association
www.beerandpub.com

FURTHER RESOURCES

Health and Safety Executive – Information regarding workplace safety including the safe use of gas cylinders. See: <http://www.hse.gov.uk>

Institute of Hospitality eBooks (held in the Online Catalogue) - A selection of ebooks providing guidance on procurement, licensing and managing the food and beverage (F&B) function in a hospitality business.

- Business Development in Licensed Retailing: A Unit Manager's Guide {Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism Series}
- Food and Beverage Cost Control
- Food Safety Handbook
- Principles of Food, Beverage, and Labor Cost Controls
- Purchasing: Selection and Procurement for the Hospitality Industry
- The HACCP Food Safety Employee Manual

Trading Standards Institute – Information on trading standards legislation affecting the industry. See: <http://www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/advice/advice-business.cfm>

DISCLAIMER

This document is intended as a guide only. While the information it contains is believed to be correct, it is not a substitute for appropriate professional advice. The Institute of Hospitality and the authors and contributors bear no responsibility for action taken solely on the basis of this information.

Institute of Hospitality, Trinity Court, 34 West Street, Sutton, Surrey, SM1 1SH, UK.

Tel: +44 (0)20 8661 4900 Fax: +44 (0)20 8661 4901

Email: library@instituteofhospitality.org Website: <http://www.instituteofhospitality.org>

© Copyright Institute of Hospitality May 2011. Registered Charity No.326180