



TECHNICAL INFORMATION SHEET 53

ILLICIT OPERATORS AND STOLEN GAS CYLINDERS

The theft of gas cylinders takes them outside of the control of the legitimate, legally regulated and quality-assured asset owner and operator.

Possession of stolen cylinders by thieves and illicit operators results in:

- **Risk of explosion.** This risk arises from damage due to mishandling, metal fatigue or uncontrolled filling (including from overpressure during filling) by illicit operators.

Compressed gas cylinders are typically rated to 130 to 250 bar, which is 130 to 250 times atmospheric pressure. This is enough to seriously injure, maim or kill.

Explosion risk is most acute at the point of illicit filling. There is also a very high risk during handling, during transportation and at intermediate or end-user premises. This presents a lethal risk to unsuspecting customers, road-users, emergency first responders, employees and the general public.

- **Gas leakage, leading to risk of asphyxiation.** This risk arises from damage due to mishandling or due to neglected, faulty equipment. Mis-labelling of the gas contents, absence of cylinder safety information and non-existence of contacts for emergency support increases the risk.

The contents of even a single small gas cylinder, leaking into an enclosed space, has potential to cause multiple fatalities from asphyxiation, including to employees, first responders and rescuers.

A gas cylinder which is mislabelled provides incorrect and potentially misleading information and may present a lethal risk to all those nearby.

- **Risk of poisoning.** This risk arises from the use of the incorrect or out-of-specification food-grade gas (food, food packaging and beverage dispense gas). This, in turn, is due to inadequate illicit operator quality control. The risk is from human ingestion of the gas by unsuspecting members of the public in bars, pubs, clubs, etc.

Cylinder security and safety. Unlike regulated gas companies who will ensure that robust security and safety measures are taken to safeguard hazardous products, illicit operators will not. Many have sinister secondary markets, which have the potential to be used or manipulated for crime and terrorism. Regulated and legitimate gas cylinder operators will secure gas cylinders, thus reducing the risk of them falling into the wrong hands and so presenting an increased risk to the public.

Customer sales and accountability. Illicit cylinder operators will make no attempt to conduct customer checks for the purposes of Product Stewardship. Illicit operators do not ensure that customers have a legitimate use for the gases, may be unaware of relevant safety information and may not understand their duty of care for the management and security of gases.

For more information:

British Compressed Gases Association (BCGA)

www.bcgga.co.uk

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