



Empty gas cylinders on pallets await pick up at the supply support activity of the 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division. Units that manage their own gas cylinder exchange program should have empty government-owned cylinders picked up and put back into the Army supply system. (Photo by Chief Warrant Officer 2 Nathaniel L. Meins)

Gas Cylinder Exchange Solutions

If your unit manages its own gas cylinder exchange program, you may need some guidance from the Defense Logistics Agency.

■ By Chief Warrant Officer 2 Nathaniel L. Meins

Whether it is nitrogen for cleaning weapons and night vision devices, oxygen and acetylene for welding and torch operations, or tetrafluoroethane to keep air conditioning systems blowing cold, industrial gases are essential to virtually every support unit in the Army today. Therefore, having an efficient and effective gas cylinder exchange program (GCEP) to manage your supply of industrial gases is also essential.

Two pivotal things that will affect your GCEP are customer-provided support and adherence to regulations. If your unit can fund a contract with a local vendor to resupply your gases, or if you have access to a post-wide cylinder exchange program, consider yourself fortunate.

However, if you are part of a stand-alone unit and manage the GCEP, you may want to familiarize yourself with the Defense Logistics Agency's (DLA's) industrial gas support program.

A Cylinder Backlog

Until recently, I was assigned to units that had GCEPs supported by post-wide cylinder exchange programs. But my current assignment at Fort Benning, Georgia, with the 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, landed me on a consolidated installation where such a luxury was not available.

My new unit's GCEP had been neglected for quite some time—so much so that my company alone had more than 50 empty cylinders wast-

ing away in rusty, makeshift cages. With what little storage space we had being filled with empty cylinders, I knew my first priority was to get the “empties” removed.

For the record, a local contractor cannot exchange government-owned cylinders for contractor-owned cylinders; however, a contractor can send off government cylinders to be filled. During the initial transition period into my new job, my predecessor informed me that our GCEP had previously been supported by a local vendor contract but it had been defunded. Therefore, gas supplies were ordered through the Army supply system, and the empty cylinders just kept piling up.

I began the uphill battle to turn in these empty (but serviceable) cylinders. I contacted local supply personnel and was told that I needed to drill a hole in each of the cylinders so they could be turned into DLA Disposition Services (formerly known as the Defense Reutilization and Marketing Office). I found this practice not only appallingly wasteful but also extremely dangerous.

I figured there had to be another way, so I dug into the regulations, namely DLA Instruction 4145.25, Storage and Handling of Liquefied and Gaseous Compressed Gasses and Their Full and Empty Cylinders, which is a joint publication that serves as the liquefied and compressed gas management manual for several Department of Defense service branches. It is also known as Army Regulation 700-68.

After reading Section 8, paragraph 8-3, I realized DLA Disposition Services will process the cylinders but simply will not “assume physical custody” of them. I felt like I had reached a dead end. I had to continue to house the cylinders, and I had to process them to be recycled even though they simply needed to be filled, not destroyed.

DLA's Program

Luckily, many years ago, a supervisor sent me a pamphlet entitled,

“DSCR Offers an Industrial Gas Support Program for the Continental United States.” The pamphlet was put out by the Defense Supply Center Richmond (now called DLA Aviation) and clearly lists step-by-step instructions of how serviceable, government-owned cylinders are to be put back into the Army supply system.

The pamphlet also lists national stock numbers (NSNs) for both full and empty cylinders, cylinder color schemes for identification purposes, points of contact to schedule pickups, phone numbers for hazardous materials hot lines, and training information.

Turning in empty cylinders includes five steps:

- Identify the empty, capped cylinders and secure them to a serviceable pallet.
- Contact Haas International with empty NSNs to receive a bill of lading (BOL) and sales order number.
- Fill out the BOL, print it, sign it, scan it, and send it back to the Haas representative.
- Schedule a pick-up.
- Have a forklift and two copies of the BOL ready when the freight contractor arrives for pickup.

Make sure you palletize the cylinders parallel to the pallet boards. Palletizing them perpendicularly will make the banding straps block the entry of the pallet jack forks.

Recommendations

If you are managing your GCEP at the company or battalion level, the first thing you should consider when ordering your initial stock is how many pieces of equipment in your unit are outfitted for gas cylinders. Pieces of equipment that are missing cylinders or have depleted cylinders should be the priority, and those cylinders should account for the majority of your first order.

Once you have a solid count for each of those gases, I recommend

adding six oxygen cylinders (247 cubic feet), four acetylene (225 cubic feet), four argon (246 cubic feet), and four oil-free nitrogen (226 cubic feet). These gases are the most commonly used gases in support activities.

Furthermore, when you create requisitions for these gases in the StandardArmyMaintenanceSystem-Enhanced, remember to split up the orders to create demands so that they will be added to the authorized stockage list and automatically reordered.

In my experience, we received full cylinders 30 to 60 days after submitting the requisition, so it is not crucial to have large quantities on hand. Just remember, cylinder NSNs beginning with “8120” are delivered empty; cylinder NSNs beginning with “6830” are delivered full.

If you are charged with revamping a severely neglected GCEP, remember that it probably took a long time to get that way, so it will probably take quite a while to correct it. You can find the DLA pamphlet at <http://www.aviation.dla.mil/userweb/aviationsupplier/commodities/pdf/Conus%20Industrial%20Gas%20book%20%2814%2003%2026%29.pdf>.

Also, coordinate with Haas International representatives, have the correct paperwork and cylinders strapped to a serviceable pallet, and have forklift support ready when the freight truck arrives. Your GCEP will turn around with just a little effort.

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