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STEPHEN D. COAN
STATE FIRE MARSHAL

MEMORANDUM

To: Heads of Fire Department

From: Stephen D. Coan
State Fire Marshal

Date: April 7, 2015

RE: **Suspected anhydrous ammonia in propane tanks**

Recently, the Department of Fire Services Hazmat Division and State Police Bomb Squad were called by a local fire department to respond to two retail propane tank exchange locations. An employee of the propane gas cylinder exchange company was servicing the sites when he discovered indications of inappropriate use believed to be related to illicit manufacture of methamphetamine. It appears that the propane in the containers was emptied and the tank was then used for anhydrous ammonia.

There has been some education on recognizing this situation provided through the National Propane Gas Association and many of the employees of propane companies are aware of the indications that another product has been carried on the tank. These indicators may include a bluish discoloration of the brass tank components (i.e. valves) and/or distortion of the tank itself. The reaction of the ammonia with the brass components makes the brass brittle and subject to failure when under pressure or if struck.

The following are factors or considerations for response to this type of incident;

- Tanks may or may not be full of Ammonia
- Leave tanks as found, DO NOT HANDLE
- Isolate immediate area 150' in all directions
- Isolate downwind 300'
- Call for the Bomb Squad and a tier 1 hazmat response

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- If possible, bring a 50 gallon drum to the scene to be located and filled with water after planning with Bomb Squad and Hazmat team.
- Urge local propane filling stations to watch for malformed tanks and/or green or blue stained valves, and to call the fire department if found, turned in, or brought for refill, leave in place and contact local fire department

You can review the information issued by the National Propane Gas Association at:

<http://www.advancedsafetyhealth.com/newsletter-blog/2008/06/10/illegal-usage-of-propane-tanks/>