

Fuel Storage - or Not?

Storing propane, gasoline, diesel fuel, or kerosene may or may not be practical or safe for you. Here are things to consider.

Propane lasts forever. In 2008 I cooked in Alaska with propane dated 1975. However, propane tanks may not last forever. Just 12 years after manufacture, tanks must be pressure-tested before a propane dealer will refill them... then tested every 10 years after that. Dealers won't refill the old 20-pound tanks with round-handled valves. It may be cheaper to buy new tanks. Propane tanks should not be stored or used indoors. Store them where there's ventilation in case the tanks leak or vent propane... and away from any possibility of an open flame!

Gasoline, diesel fuel, and kerosene don't last forever. They can go bad in as little as 3 to 6 months. A fuel stabilizer can prevent this. I have had best results with products from Power Research Inc., <www.priproducts.com>, (713) 490-1100. I use "PRI-G" for gasoline and "PRI-D" for diesel fuel and kerosene. One quart of PRI-G treats 512 gallons of fuel. I had a lawnmower that wouldn't run on old fuel. Treated with PRI-G, the mower ran. "STABIL" is another fuel stabilizer.

It is difficult to store large quantities of gasoline because it needs to be rotated. I store 25 to 35 gallons in red plastic cans in a ventilated outbuilding. Every month I try to burn 5 gallons in our vehicles and replace it with fresh fuel. I have a tag on each fuel can with the date it was filled. Diesel fuel or kerosene (in blue cans) would also need to be rotated. On a farm or ranch, I'd have elevated fuel tanks. I'd have to use the fuel up more quickly than I do now, however. The EPA will give you fits if you want an underground storage tank, so don't even bother.

If you live in an apartment, or in a house with an attached garage, don't store fuel there. Propane is flammable and heavier than air. Gasoline vapors are explosive. Diesel fuel and kerosene have fewer vapors but are still flammable. If your gas furnace touches off your stored fuel, the fire can burn down your home.

I built an outbuilding that has a good roof but lets air in around the floor. This is well-suited to fuel storage. Fuel vapors can get out. The building is not attached to any other building or to electricity. That's a lot of work to store 25-35 gallons of gasoline and a few bottles of propane - but it's as safe as I can do it.

Check with your fire department to see if there are rules on how much fuel you can store. Ask them for suggestions for safe fuel storage. Abide by the fire safety rules for your own safety and that of others.