



To: Natural Gas Vehicle Owners, Operators, and Repair Facilities

From: NGVAmerica Technology & Development Committee

Date: November 7, 2023

Subject: **Technology Bulletin – Cold Weather Notice for Natural Gas PRDs and Other Best Practices for Engine Operation**

Natural gas vehicle (NGV) owners and operators as well as NGV service and maintenance personnel should be aware that the occurrence of colder temperatures necessitates additional precautions.

Frozen Moisture in Natural Gas PRDs

The potential for moisture to collect, freeze, and cause damage in pressure relief devices (PRDs) and in PRD vent lines requires special attention when the temperature drops below freezing. In fact, water can cause problems even without freezing, potentially resulting in damage and the following unintended consequences:

1. unexpected activation of the PRD, resulting in the release of the fuel container contents,
2. PRD leaks, or
3. delayed activation or complete failure to reduce tank or cylinder pressure when required (e.g. during a thermal event).

PRDs are intended to be used as a safety device for NGVs by releasing the natural gas fuel container contents in the case of a vehicle fire. The location of PRDs can vary, but they are typically located at one or both ends of the NGV fuel containers. In cases where multiple NGV fuel containers are used, the PRDs may exist in a manifold configuration, typically connected to a vent port.

Incidents have shown that moisture from rainwater and vehicle washes may enter the PRD vent systems through accessible openings. Vent outlets that are open due to missing moisture caps are a common point of entry for water; however, loose fitting caps can also allow moisture to enter the PRD vent system. Pressure washing poses a particular threat to the unintended removal of loose or damaged caps and can also result in water ingress through holes inherent to the design of some vent systems. Moisture collected in a PRD system can cause PRD internal components to become

distorted, resulting in premature PRD activation. This potential failure mode exists on any CNG fuel system with openings in the vent system.

NGV manufacturers typically recommend routine inspection of PRD vent systems to verify the integrity of the vent lines and assure that all vent caps are in place. The interval of this inspection varies between vehicles. NGV owners and operators are encouraged to consult their vehicle owner's guide and/or the manufacturer for appropriate inspection procedures. If vent caps are discovered to be missing, or there are other signs of moisture present in the PRD vent system, the owner/operator should contact their vehicle manufacturer immediately for recommended actions.

Other inspection guidance for PRD vent systems is available from codes and standards documents such as the following:

1. **CSA/ANSI NGV 6.1** – *Compressed natural gas (CNG) fuel storage and delivery systems for road vehicles* – 2021 edition
2. **CGA C-6.4** – *Methods For External Visual Inspection of Natural Gas Vehicle and Hydrogen Gas Vehicle Fuel Containers and Their Installations* – Edition 4
3. **NFPA 52** – *Vehicular Natural Gas Fuel Systems Code* – 2023 edition

Engine Operating Tips in Cold Weather

Derived from the September 2020 edition of Cummins' Natural Gas Engine Tech Talk, best practices for operating natural gas engines in below freezing conditions are as follows:

1. **Do not use cold starting aids** with NGVs. Testing natural gas engines in extremely cold weather has shown spark-ignited natural gas engines have better starting performance compared to equivalent diesel engines that rely on cold starting aids.
2. **Do not use fuel system heaters.** Cold weather accessories such as fuel tank heaters and fuel filter heating elements may have their place with diesel vehicles, but fuel system heaters are not recommended or necessary with NGVs.
3. **Allow the engine to warm up.** For better performance and to eliminate the chance of fuel system components freezing, start and allow the engine to idle at low RPM for 5 minutes. This idle time may not allow enough time to heat the cab, but it is enough time to warm the engine's major components, including fuel regulators and various sensors.
4. **Avoid excessive engine idle time.** Natural gas engines that experience periods of idling in excess of 15 consecutive minutes are more prone to excessive bearing and ring wear and oil dilution. The same adverse effects apply to diesel engines as well, and additional detrimental effects on diesel exhaust aftertreatment systems and their performance can also be expected with excessive idle time. Regardless of the vehicle's fuel type, an auxiliary power unit

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(APU) should always be utilized instead of the vehicle's primary propulsion engine for climate control in an unoccupied cab or managing the hotel loads in a sleeper cab.

5. **Engine shutdown protocol following excessive idle time should include a short period of high idle.** If it is necessary to idle your natural gas engine for an extended period, occasionally operate the engine at high idle to help clear moisture that may have accumulated in your engine's CCV and EGR systems.
6. **Reference Cummins Service Bulletin 4332709**, "Operation of Automotive Natural Gas Engines in Cold Climates". Available on QuickServe Online or through your local Cummins representative, this bulletin contains detailed guidelines to ensure successful operation of Cummins natural gas engines in cold conditions.

Supporting New NGV Fleets

Experienced providers within the NGV industry involved in refueling, service, and maintenance operations are encouraged to spread word of this information and educate newly transitioned fleets they are working with on the importance of these best practices.

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