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Rising Safety Concerns as Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) becomes popular source of Energy

Given the growth of Liquid Petroleum Gas Industry in Zimbabwe, a lot of challenges are emerging in the distribution chain of this very important but very hazardous product, putting the lives of consumers of this vital product into potential danger. In the distribution system many parties may physically handle the cylinder before it reaches the customer. The importance of maintaining and observing good business practices throughout the distribution chain therefore becomes an integral part of customer safety.

The attendant situation in Zimbabwe has seen the emergence of a certain crop of players who are unscrupulous and paying little or no attention to proper procedures for filling and handling LP Gas and related equipment. This is despite the clearly laid out compliance regulations set out by the Zimbabwe Energy Regulatory Authority (ZERA). Unlike other jurisdictions in the region and beyond, the Zimbabwe LPG industry model is one of refilling of gas tanks, where the ownership of tanks or cylinders is individual as opposed to corporate ownership. This model therefore places the responsibility of managing the cylinder squarely on the individual owner.

This set up presents challenges in that it gives direct control and ownership of the cylinder to the individual who in this case does not have the guarantee to ensure proper usage, handling and servicing of the cylinder. As such, the owner is exposed to the risk that misuse of the cylinder could present to people, and resultant damage it could have to property. In South Africa, the Model is Service and Exchange where ownership of cylinders is by the operator or service provider. In this set-up, the cylinder sold to the seller who

becomes the cylinder owner with direct control over its subsequent use. This set-up places the responsibility of ensuring that cylinders and containers are properly maintained to the seller (owner) or operator. However, proper and safe use of gas product and equipment is the responsibility of everyone in the distribution chain including the customer.

The Liquid Petroleum Gas Safety Association of Zimbabwe (LPGSAZ) views the bad practices currently obtaining in Zimbabwe as an industry issue, and is convinced that government alone through its regulatory bodies cannot manage to ensure safe, sustainable standard practices in the operation of Liquid petroleum gas business in Zimbabwe. The gas Industry itself should complement Government efforts by promoting a self regulatory environment among its members through creation of standard operating practices. However, there are two essential areas of government involvement; which are the elimination of bad practices through its regulatory Agencies and providing a competitive business climate.

For private business to bring the benefit of LP Gas to those wanting or needing its products and services there must be a 'level playing field' where the rules are the same for all players. Only then will business take the risk of investment, provide jobs, and contribute to the economic welfare of the communities in which it operates. A business climate that favours some over others, either by lack of enforcement or inequitable enforcement of regulations, will ultimately prove a disincentive to the legitimate operators and encourage a drop in industry standards.