

# What to know about how camping stove propane is changing in California

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Gregory Thomas

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Fuel container recycling bins like this one are dispersed throughout Yosemite National Park.  
Tracy Barbutes/Special to The Chronicle

Anyone who camps in California will soon have to rethink the handheld propane canisters they use to fuel their camping stoves, lanterns and heaters.

A bill that Gov. Gavin Newsom signed into law last month will make California the first state to ban the sale of single-use one-pound propane canisters — the dark green ones sold by brands like Coleman and Bernzomatic. The law takes effect in January 2028.

Given that between 4.5 million and 7 million of those cylinders are sold in California annually, according to the California Product Stewardship Council, a nonprofit coalition that sponsored the bill, the slate of camping fuel products is going to change significantly in the next few years as stores phase them out and new products become available.

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“Consumers are going to see products they’ve never seen before as we move to options that have a lower impact” on the environment, said Josh Simpson, co-founder of Little Kamper, a one-pound refillable propane canister exchange company in Manteca.

To help Californians prepare for the coming changes, the Chronicle spoke to two industry experts about what kinds of alternative camping propane products are available on the market and how to use them: Simpson, whose company has expanded sales from 10 western U.S. states to the entire lower 48 in the past two years; and Doug Kobold, executive director of the California Product Stewardship Council. Their advice is summarized below.

**Q: What should I do with the Coleman or Berzomatic single-use one-pound canister that I use for camping?**

**A:** Use the gas during your next camping trip, then consider switching to a refillable canister option — more on those below. Once your current, non-refillable canister is empty, make sure you recycle it properly by taking it to your local household hazardous waste site. They ship them to special facilities that have equipment to safely evacuate any remaining gas and then puncture the canister so the metal is safe to recycle.

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**What refillables are on the market?**

There are a few you can find on shelves at Sports Basement, Ace Hardware and other retailers in California: [Fuel Keg](#) (made by Mr. Heater), [Flame King](#) and [Little Kamper](#) (which uses Flame King’s canister). Each costs roughly \$20 and should be good for 12 years before it needs to be recertified or retired. Note: Fuel Keg and Flame King canisters generally come without gas in them; Little Kamper’s come ready to go with gas.

More product options are probably coming soon, Kobold and Simpson said. They expect a refillable option from Worthington, the largest manufacturer of camp-stove propane cylinders nationwide that makes the canisters used by Coleman and Berzomatic. (Worthington did not reply to a request for comment.)

“Between now and January 2028, I’m confident there will be additional innovations not only for people to fill their gas canisters but to save money too,” Simpson said.



Campers use their Coleman stove to prepare coffee and breakfast in Yosemite National Park. Sales of the single-use canister pictured here will be phased out in California beginning in 2028.

Tracy Barbutes/Special to The Chronicle

### **What's the cost difference between a refillable canister and a single-use canister?**

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The up-front cost is significantly different. A typical Coleman one-pounder sells for between \$5 and \$10, which is much cheaper than the refillable options.

However, it's just \$2-\$4 to refuel a refillable canister at a number of participating service centers — more on those below.

Plus, factoring in the cost of recycling the single-use canisters as well as the environmental toll of manufacturing, transporting and disposing of them should help clarify the benefits to California consumers of switching to refillables, Kobold said.

“If people were paying the true cost of these, including the recycling, then we’re on par with the cost of the refill system,” he said.



Some of the refillable propane tanks from Flame King and Little Kamper on the market, including refillable adapters.

California Product Stewardship Council

### **I bought a refillable one-pound cylinder. Can I refill it at home?**

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Yes, you can do it yourself at home by using special valve adapters that connect from the one-pound cylinder to a larger propane tank — say, the 20-pounder you use to heat your backyard gas grill. The adapters cost about \$25 online.

Refilling takes about a minute, though it requires care and practice, according to marketing materials for canisters on the market. They recommend using rubberized gloves and perhaps a face shield when transferring fuel, just to be safe.

### **If I don't want to do it myself, where can I refill these things?**

There are more than 100 refill locations in California, including Sports Basement and Ace Hardware stores. For a master map of locations where you can refill your one-pounder, check [RefuelYourFun.org](http://RefuelYourFun.org). The site advises people to call a location in advance to make sure they're still participating.

Bay Area residents, listen up: Sports Basement has a program in which they'll refill Flame King's one-pound propane canisters for free for members; non-members pay \$2.

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Little Kamper propane canisters are seen at a store in Yosemite National Park.  
Tracy Barbutes/Special to The Chronicle

### **Is there an exchange program for the one-pound cylinders?**

Yes, there is! Little Kamper runs a national tank-exchange program with hundreds of locations around the country, including dozens in California. It's modeled on the backyard-barbecue tank system, so it should feel pretty familiar: for a discounted price of \$12, you can swap an empty cylinder for a full one at participating hardware stores, sporting goods stores, gas stations and other places, including Yosemite, Sequoia-Kings Canyon and Joshua Tree national parks.

“We expect to see more exchange models,” Kobold said. “And we fully expect these programs will evolve into a system as convenient — or more convenient — as those 20-pound barbecue tanks because there are a lot more places that will carry these one-pounders.”

### **Are other states taking a similar stance as California?**

Not yet, but maybe soon, Simpson said.

“You’ll see this copied in other states that have significant summertime outdoor recreation,” like Colorado, Oregon, Washington, Vermont, New Hampshire and elsewhere, he said. “This isn’t a California problem, it’s a one-pound propane problem.”

*Reach Gregory Thomas: [gthomas@sfchronicle.com](mailto:gthomas@sfchronicle.com)*

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Travel & Outdoors Editor

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Gregory Thomas is The Chronicle's Editor of Travel and Outdoors, focusing on California activities and destinations. Before that, he served as Senior Editor at Outside Magazine in New Mexico where he edited news, enterprise stories, and features in print and online. He's worked at a tech-media startup, reported for major metro newspapers, written features for national magazines, and done his share of internships. He holds a Master's degree in journalism from UC Berkeley.