

Traveling with the Propane Turned On

Should I be traveling with the propane turned on in my RV?

This is a question that gets asked frequently by first time Airstreamers as well as the curious RVer looking for an opinion. Most propane appliance manufacturers recommend traveling with propane turned off.

The issue is people want to have the refrigerator working to keep things cold while traveling so they opt to turn on the propane. I was doing some research recently on the topic and came across this article on the AIS Insurance website that covered some pros and cons to traveling with the propane turned on. I believe it is a good overview of the question.

Traveling with propane poses a dilemma for RVers: Should it be turned on or off while driving down the road? There are pros and cons to each; therefore, each RVer must weigh the facts and decide which option best suits their comfort level.

Traveling With Propane On

There are several conveniences to traveling with the propane on. First, it allows the refrigerator to run, which guarantees the food inside remains cool and fresh. In cold weather, propane allows you to run your RV's heating system in your RV and keep water in the water heater hot. Some motorized RVs require the propane be on to run the generator.

Clearly there are benefits to traveling with the propane on; however, there are definite risks. Propane lines can break if an accident occurs while you're on the road or if an appliance moves while traveling. With no restriction in the line, the propane in the tank can escape. Since propane can ignite with only a small amount in the air (eight parts per million of propane), any triggering device in the vicinity will light it. A broken propane line is extremely dangerous and can trigger an explosion and fire.

If you elect to travel with the refrigerator operating on propane, you must turn it - and all appliances - off prior to entering a fuel stop. Most propane tanks can only be filled Traveling with the Propane Turned On to 80 percent capacity to allow expansion of the gas in the tank, and prevent the pressure relief valve from allowing gas to escape. When the main gas valve on the tank is turned on, it is critical that you fully open it until it locks to enable the excess flow valve to operate.

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If you choose to travel with your propane off, you forfeit the additional warmth of your vehicle's heating system, the guarantee food in your refrigerator will remain cold and water in your water heater will remain hot. However, it's a tradeoff that may someday save your life. By traveling with the propane off, you minimize the risk of an accident becoming much worse due to propane leakage.

Many states even require that the propane be turned off before entering tunnels. If keeping your food fresh is the main reason you've chosen to drive with your propane on in the past, reevaluate this decision based on weather conditions and your refrigerator type and age. With new technology, it's no longer necessary to travel with propane on to keep food in the refrigerator from spoiling. With minimal

opening, most refrigerators manufactured after 1995 keep an internal temperature of less than 40 degrees for eight hours, on a 100-degree day.

To ensure your food stays cool, you can purchase a fridge fan. These small, battery-operated fans can be found at Camping World or Walmart for a small price. A fridge fan circulates cold air much like a convection oven circulates warm air. Place the fan on the lower shelf for best results. Positioning a stainless steel bowl filled with ice next to the fan keeps your refrigerator even colder, longer.

If you open the refrigerator door only long enough to remove what you need, food will keep for many hours as you travel. Likewise, the seals on the freezer will keep things frozen for several hours, even on the hottest days, if you don't open the door. Ice cream may soften, but should not melt.

If you are unsure of the temperature inside your refrigerator and concerned about spoilage, purchase and use a refrigerator thermometer. Most experts recommend an inside temperature between 33 and 40 degrees. According to the FDA, food spoilage can begin to occur in certain foods if the temperature is maintained above 40 degrees for more than a few hours.

Here are some additional tips to help maintain the temperature in your refrigerator when you are traveling with propane off: Keep drinks, lunch, and other items you'll want during the day's travel in a small ice chest outside of the refrigerator. Prepare meals and snacks prior to leaving and place them in a spot in the refrigerator where you can quickly open the door and retrieve all items at once.

Turn the refrigerator to the coldest setting the night before you'll be traveling. Leave it there until you leave the next day. It will maintain a colder temperature for a longer period of time.

When traveling with the propane off, remember to also turn the appliances off. Many appliances now have an electric ignition that causes sparking when lighting the pilot light. This could also trigger an explosion at a fuel stop. You must turn the propane off at the tank for total safety. If there is an accident, having your propane turned off avoids a situation where a line breakage in an accident feeds a fire caused by the accident. Some three-way refrigerators give the option of operating on 12 volts while you are going down the road. Using this option, if you have it, is the safest choice.

If you travel with your generator running, you can turn your refrigerator to the electric setting. You are doing your generator a favor by having as many appliances turned on as possible - in fact, generators operate most efficiently under a full load.

Most new motor homes are wired so that the refrigerator cannot be operated on electricity from the inverter, while going down the road. This is done because the refrigerator requires a lot of energy. Operating the refrigerator on electricity while traveling has been known to cause premature alternator failure on the vehicle while it is trying to keep up with the demand. If your vehicle is wired so you can operate the refrigerator with the inverter on, and you have to replace your alternator frequently, you should take this into consideration.

If safety is your first priority, then the clear choice is to drive with your propane turned off. If you feel the benefits of driving with your propane on outweigh the potential dangers, then you may choose to keep it turned on. Either way, you're making an informed choice.

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