

SEPA

SOUTHEAST PROPANE ALLIANCE

MARCH 2024

NEWS



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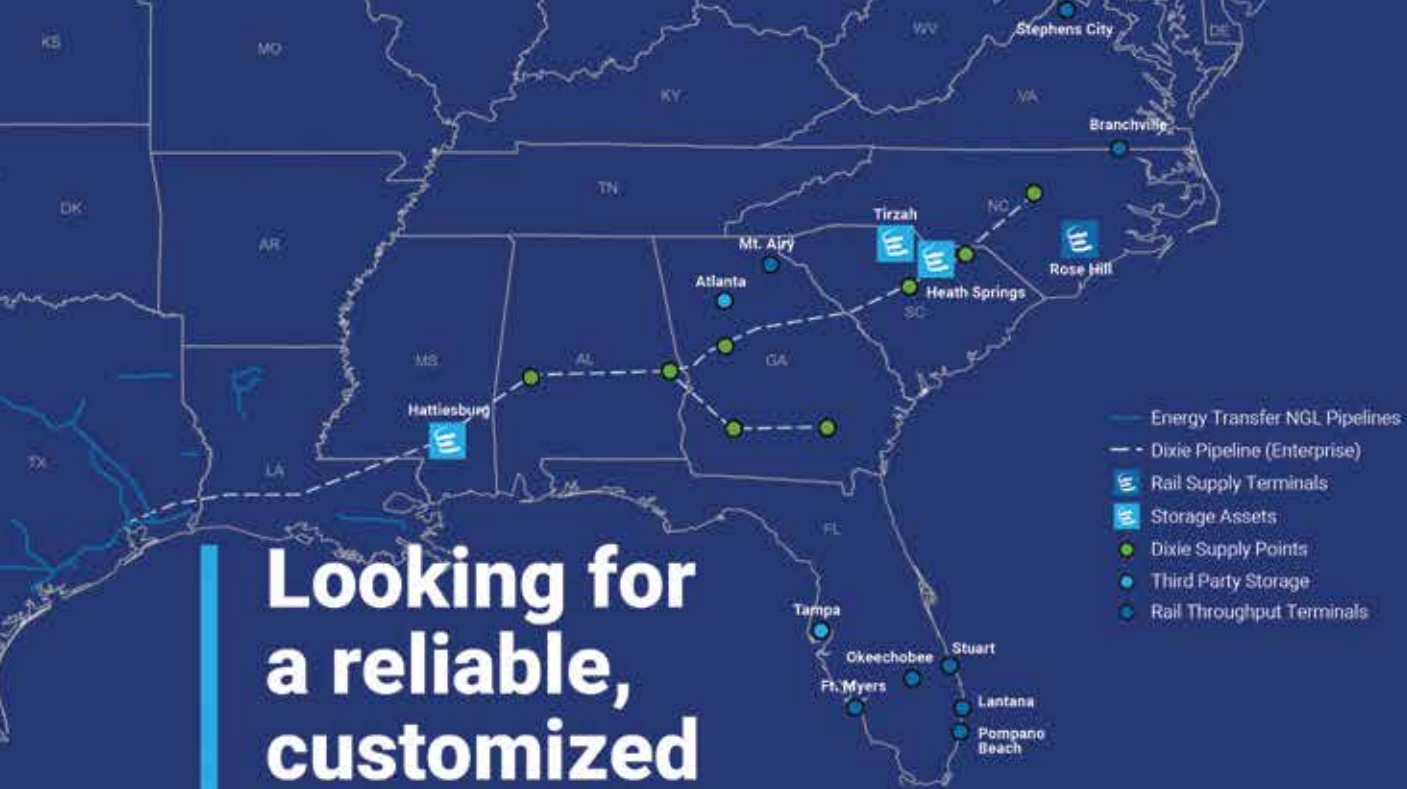
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BY TYLER MISEL,
SEPA CHAIRMAN

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

GREETINGS SEPA MEMBERS!

>> I hope everyone has had a good start to the year! There's a lot going on this month and next. We had a great Technology, Standards and Safety (TS&S) committee meeting out on Hilton Head Island earlier in the month. We're always looking for new folks to join us and test the waters in helping shape the code that is crucial to the safety of our customers, employees, and overall industry. If you're interested, please reach out to myself or Dave Donahue for more information.

Our next event will be the Spring Board Meeting which will be held in conjunction to the NPGA SE Convention & Expo. SEPA will be having a Breakfast and Board Meeting on Saturday morning, April 6. More details on that will be coming soon.

This year will be the first year in Charlotte, so hopefully we'll have a good turnout.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at upcoming events. Have a happy, and safe, spring! 🌱

Tyler Misel
SEPA Chairman

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BY JOHN R. JESSUP,
SEPA PRESIDENT/CEO

Virtual Reality to DOE Cooktop Rules

...February had it all



National Trainers Conference

PERC put on an outstanding training event, February 21–22, in Orlando for the National Trainers Conference. SEPA was well represented with 15 participants in attendance from North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. There were 150 trainers in attendance at the event. There are big changes coming to the CETP curriculum, both in how it's going to be taught and the terminology used. For instance, Skills evaluations will now be called On the Job Training (OJT), PERC is moving away from Certification and creating CEUs with its online customizable curriculum.

Virtual Reality

PERC has partnered with NextWave Safety Solutions, which uses virtual reality (VR) to train our workforce. I was able to successfully light a pilot light on a tank hot water heater. We plan to utilize VR at the job fairs we attend and at recruiting events at military bases to attract prospects to our booth.

Due to significant demand for CDL-B drivers from members, SEPATEC is working with NPGA to utilize their ACE program to create an in-house Entry Level Driver Training (ELDT) program partnership. We are exploring the purchase of a training vehicle to train on the Behind the Wheel and pre-trip inspections.


Ban on Unvented Heaters

In a war that has been waged since at least 2015 against the ASHRAE 62.2 Committee over its attempt to ban the use of unvented heaters in ASHRAE 62.2-compliant

buildings, an NPGA-led coalition has won an important battle at the highest levels of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). The ANSI Appeals Board Decision, released February 13, agrees with the appellants that actions taken not only by the 62.2 Committee and ASHRAE but also by the ANSI Executive Standards Council to dismiss concerns raised regarding the integrity and transparency of the standards development process were premature. The Appeals Board stated that a more thorough investigation into not only the procedural allegations but also the technical basis for the prohibition is warranted and directed the Executive Standards Council to schedule a hearing expeditiously to address all the concerns raised. Credit goes to Dave Delaquila of Aquila Consulting, who represents NPGA and leads the coalition that includes AGA and HPBA, among others. For more information, please contact Bruce Swiecicki.

DOE Releases Cooktop Rule

The DOE has released the final cooktop rule, which NPGA supports. The compromise allows for gas cooktops to use 1770 kBtu/year, a significant change from the standard proposed in the

February 2023 rulemaking of 1204 KBtu/year. The compromise is only a minor deviation from the baseline standard reviewed by DOE in the proposed rulemaking, which was initially 1775 KBtu/year. This compromise should result in consumers having access to all of the features in their stoves and ranges that they have come to expect and enjoy, and have no meaningful effect on the gas stove market. For further information on the compromise, which includes product classes beyond consumer cooktops, please contact NPGA Vice President of Regulatory & Industry Affairs Benjamin Nussdorf. 

John Jessup

SEPA President and CEO

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Date of Birth: _____ High School Graduation Month/Year: _____ Actual Date or Expected Date

High School Name: _____ City: _____ State: _____

College/Technical School Name: _____ City: _____ State: _____

Have You Been Accepted to the above College/Technical School? Yes No Planned Field of Study: _____

List Other Grants/Awards/Scholarship: Name/Amount: _____ \$

Name/Amount: _____ \$

Name/Amount: _____ \$

Name of Parent or Grandparent Employed in Propane Industry: _____

Company Employed By: _____ Location: _____

Position of Employment: _____ Length of Employment: _____

Home Phone: () _____ Applicant's Home Address: _____

Cell Phone: () _____ City/State/Zip: _____

Parent's or Grandparent's Signature: _____ Applicant's Signature: _____

Eligibility: The applicant must be a senior in a certified high school with plans to enter college or technical school the school year following graduation from high school, or a student already in a college or technical school with plans to re-enroll the following school year. Applicant, applicant's parent or applicant's grandparent must be a full-time employee of either a Southeast Propane Alliance (SEPA) Retail Propane Marketer licensed to do business in South Carolina or of a SEPA South Carolina Affiliate Member company in good standing with SEPA and who has worked in the propane industry for at least one (1) year prior to application submission.

Each applicant must provide all of the following to be considered for a scholarship:

1. Completed South Carolina Propane Gas Scholarship Application.
2. Official transcripts from the three (3) previous years of study (high school, college or technical school), ACT and SAT scores.
3. Class rank and GPA for last completed year of high school.
4. At least one typed paragraph on why the applicant wants to continue his/her education.
5. Two (2) letters of recommendation, the first which must be from the applicant's high school Counselor/Principal or college/technical school Advisor/Dean and the second which must be from a person in the applicant's community that is not a relative of the applicant.
6. A descriptive list of significant honors received and of achievements accomplished during the last 3 or more years.
7. A copy of the applicant's letter of acceptance from the college or technical school the applicant plans to attend. (Must be submitted no later than June 1st)

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*Insuring the Propane Industry
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Marketing Your Propane Company in the Age of AI



BY JASON ERWIN,
NATIONAL SALES
REPRESENTATIVE

>> **You don't need to be a bona fide tech nerd** to know about the seismic changes taking place in the digital space these days. Seemingly, everyone is talking about how artificial intelligence (AI) is changing every part of our economy. The AI revolution has been a long time in the making, but it's become unavoidable recently. Virtually every segment of our society, from governments to educational institutions to the entertainment industry, is working to figure out how to leverage AI technology.

Propane providers are no exception. The journey that fuel customers take to select a propane company has changed considerably. The old model of driving awareness through traditional marketing (even through digital channels) is less applicable by the day. Today's prospects search for home comfort providers through extensive research that takes them to many places in the digital space. Their individual journeys begin at different points: clicking on a link in an email, searching for help on an HVAC issue, seeing an ad on Facebook, etc.

If you aren't establishing your company as a trustworthy authority throughout this entire digital space, these prospects are walking right past without even noticing you.

So, how can propane companies leverage the most up-to-date technologies to achieve an effective marketing balance? What works, and how can you *know* that it works? Is your marketing partner providing you with the best strategy, the best technology, and the best metrics to measure your success?

There are some huge implications for how we can use AI technology to optimize your marketing strategy. At Warm Thoughts Communications, we are already integrating AI into how we optimize propane client campaigns, analyze their success, and provide insights to propane businesses to improve their customer acquisition and retention.

Mapping the Customer's Journey

You might have heard that Google recently moved to a new data analytics system, Google Analytics 4 (GA4). This change upends quite a few of the metrics that businesses have grown accustomed to reviewing. However, what GA4 offers in return is incredibly valuable when effectively leveraged.

Essentially, this new system creates a more holistic view of your online performance. It tracks user activity through their full journey, whether they're seeing your ad on Facebook, clicking on a propane delivery page on your website after a Google search, or submitting a form to request service.

All this data provides a map of customer behavior, and it can inform how you allocate your resources to attract new business more effectively.

When you combine GA4's insights with the data you receive every single day—customer addresses, phone numbers, communication preferences, social media information—your marketing team can draw from a pretty significant trove of information.

Finding The Right User at the Right Time

Using this trove of user data and evolving AI tools, we can help propane companies reach potential customers more effectively and use their money smarter. The most effective, cutting-edge strategies require AI technology to identify the best leads and deploy resources effectively.



Working from the extremely detailed data discussed above, we can develop cross-channel campaigns that respond in real time. That means we can weigh the different components of these campaigns based on a client's goals. The campaigns include search ads and social components, working in tandem and constantly being recalibrated and reassessed.

The result is that your company is attracting customers without overspending on platforms that won't get you the types of leads you want.

And these tools will be able to go a step further in optimization in the near future. For example, AI tools will soon engage with users online and analyze a CSR's phone conversation to determine precisely the nature of the interaction and its value to your business. This data will not only illuminate how successful your marketing is but also help you to streamline your customer service practices quickly and efficiently.

The Human Element of AI

These AI-driven tools are revolutionizing how small and mid-size businesses, like the propane providers we work with, can bring in more customers. But AI cannot replace the human element.

After all, it is your team members' interactions with customers and prospects that help develop the data sets powering these strategies. When we create a campaign, our team identifies keywords and creates content based on our knowledge of your goals. We apply guardrails to prevent the campaign from over-valuing a particular keyword, channel, or demographic.

Finally, our digital marketing experts are constantly assessing the success of a campaign and reporting back to the client. AI tools enable us to do this more efficiently and integrate ever-larger and more detailed data pools. But in the end, a team of humans is executing your vision and is accountable for its success.

As with any marketing tool, AI is not a silver bullet. However, it can power some potentially game-changing processes to optimize your propane company's digital presence and bring in more new customers for less. 🔥

Jason Erwin is the National Sales Representative for Warm Thoughts Communications. He is a digital marketing expert with 20-plus years' experience working with propane providers across the U.S. You can speak to Jason about the most advanced marketing tools for your business by contacting him at jerwin@warmthoughts.com.



WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

This picture was taken as the driver returned from making a delivery to a container on the other side of the building, which he accessed by pulling the hose through the garage area. Section 6.7.1.3 prohibits routing the hose in or through buildings. Placement of the container and bobtail needs to be considered when containers are installed to avoid what you see here.



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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

SEPA & SEPATEC | 2024



April 4-7

2024 SEPA Spring Board Meeting
Charlotte, NC



May 15-16

2024 Georgia State Membership Meeting
The Graduate Hotel
Athens, GA



June 9-12

2024 Annual SEPA Convention
Wild Dunes Resort
Isle of Palms, SC



September 15-17

2024 SEPA Fall Meeting
Harrah's Casino Resort
Cherokee, NC

April 5-7	SE Convention & Expo	Charlotte, NC
June 9-11	SEPA Convention	
Sept 13-17	SEPA Fall Meeting	Cherokee, NC
<hr/>		
January 22-March 17	SEPATEC Winter Term	Graham, NC
March 11 & 12	NC CETP Basic	Online
March 13	NC Fuel Piping Perp	Raleigh
March 25-27	NC CETP Bobtail	Raleigh
March 25-27	SC CETP Exterior 4.1	Columbia, SC
April 1-May 24	SEPATEC Spring Term	Graham, NC
April 1 & 2	GA CETP Basic (S)	Macon, GA
April 3-5	GA CETP Bobtail (S)	Macon, GA
April 8 & 9	NC CETP Basic	Online
April 10	NC Fuel Piping Prep	Hickory, NC
April 15-16	GA CETP Basic (N)	Gainesville, GA
April 17-19	GA CETP Bobtail (N)	Gainesville, GA
April 22-24	NC CETP Bobtail	Hickory, NC
April 29-May 1	SC CETP Interior 4.2	Columbia, SC
May 2	SC Venting	Columbia, SC
May 20 & 21	GA CETP Basic (S)	Macon, GA
May 22-24	GA CETP Bobtail (S)	Macon, GA
May 27-29	SC CETP Plant Ops	Columbia, SC

May 27-June 7	OPEN for SEPATEC in GA	
June 3-5	GA CETP Plant Ops (N)	Gainesville, GA
June 6	GA Gas Check (N)	Gainesville, GA
June 10-August 2	SEPATEC Summer Term	Graham, NC
June 17-20	NC CETP Bobtail	Raleigh, NC
June 24-26	GA CETP Plant Ops (S)	Macon, GA
June 27	GA Gas Check (S)	Macon, GA
July 8 & 9	SC CETP Basic	Columbia, SC
July 10-12	SC CETP Bobtail	Columbia, SC
July 8 & 9	NC CETP Basic	Online
July 10	NC Fuel Piping	Raleigh, NC
July 22-24	NC CETP Bobtail	Raleigh, NC
July 22 & 23	GA CETP Basic (S)	Macon, GA
July 24	GA Gas Check (S)	Macon, GA
July 29-31	GA CETP Bobtail (S)	Macon, GA
August 5-September 6	Open for SEPATEC in GA	
September 9 & 10	GA CETP Basic (N)	Gainesville, GA
September 11-13	GA CETP Bobtail (N)	Gainesville, GA
September 23-25	SEPATEC Fall Term	Graham, NC
September 23 - 25	GA CETP Plant Ops (N)	Gainesville, GA
Sept 26	GA Gas Check (N)	Gainesville, GA

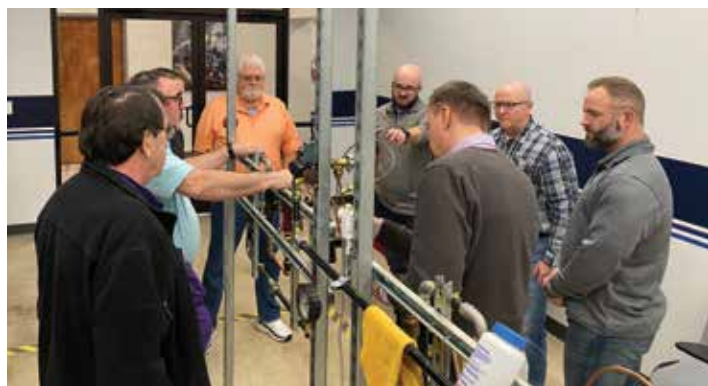


REGO IS AT SEPATEC



As one of SEPATEC's biggest supporters and partners, ReGo is at SEPATEC training their Global Sales Teams – North America, Central America, and South America on ReGo's latest products and innovations.







BY RICHARD FREDENBURG,
NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE AND
CONSUMER SERVICES

Off-Truck Remotes

>>> One of the significant advances in safety to come this industry's way

is the requirement for an off-truck remote shutdown device. This became a rule under the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) as part of the findings of "the Sanford incident" in 1996. That incident was initiated when the hose of a transport making a delivery came apart. About 40,000 gallons of propane were released that afternoon. An off-truck remote device would have saved as much as 10,000 of those gallons.

The other 30,000 gallons were lost because of a broken back-check valve and ineffective excess-flow check valves in the two bulk containers' openings. That loss led to several other non-DOT requirements in the *LP-Gas Code*. We have been dealing well with the *LP-Gas Code* requirements, less so with the DOT requirement.

The DOT requirement is found in 49 CFR §173.315(n)(3). It reads, in part, "... a cargo tank motor vehicle must have an off-truck remote means to close the internal self-closing stop valve and shut off all motive and auxiliary power equipment upon activation by a qualified person attending the unloading of the cargo tank motor vehicle. ..."

I remember one incident where the bobtail driver probably would not have died if he had this off-truck remote available. Regrettably,

the incident was before the DOT rule was written. During this incident, the driver could not stop the flow of gas when his faulty delivery nozzle broke away from the fill valve and failed to close. He ran toward the bobtail with the spewing nozzle to get it away from the house. The released propane found a source of ignition, and the rest is history.


Inspection items for a missing or nonfunctioning off-truck remote are on a couple of our inspection forms. We have been treating this as an information item only, not assessing penalties or causing a follow-up inspection. We looked a little closer at the *LP-Gas Code* to determine if we had the authority to assess penalties. We feel that section 9.4.1.3 grants us that authority.

We can track the frequency of this violation. There were 73 violations for no off-truck remote present or of it being non-operating in the four-year period of truck inspections during the effective time of the 2020 edition of the *LP-Gas Code*. This was out of 3,560 bobtail inspections, resulting in a 2.1% violation rate. This is a higher rate than failure to use wheel stops! It's reported that the violating drivers often said, "I left it at home on the dresser." Dead batteries were another common finding.

This brings up other implications. Another part of the DOT rule is that the off-truck remote be tested before the first delivery every day. (49 CFR §177.840(o)) If the off-truck remote is not available/not functioning, this pre-trip test is almost certainly not being performed. In fairness, the test must be performed no more than 18 hours before the first delivery so it could have been performed the evening before.

If the inspector sees that the driver does not know how to reset the truck to start the engine or to open the internal self-closing stop valve, it is clear that the test of the off-truck remote is not being performed often enough for the driver to remember how to perform the required steps. This is a serious failure in training or in following training.

There is another aspect of this requirement that is not always followed. The rule requires the device to "... shut off all motive and auxiliary power equipment ..." It shuts off the engine and closes the valve but does not always kill power to all the **auxiliary** equipment on the truck. I don't know if that is a design flaw or an installation failure.


 **One of the significant advances in safety to come this industry's way is the requirement for an off-truck remote shutdown device.**

We are concerned that this safety device has this high of a violation/failure rate. A 2.1% rate may not seem high, but that was 73 times that we found the driver and consumers were not being protected. Obviously, there were other times the remotes were absent when no inspector was present.

Considering this, we are moving this inspection item from an information violation to an immediate penalty violation because it's an intentional act to operate the truck without the remote.

Our tracking will be per inspection series, and the penalty will increase on the second and subsequent violations recorded on follow-up inspections if found again. We expect that the companies will pass this along to the drivers to pay. Drivers can ensure that they will not have to pay a penalty by making sure that they have the remote with them at all working times. The test each day will confirm that the batteries are good and will likely last through the day.

As with other penalties we assess and collect, we get only a small portion to help cover our expenses associated with the penalties. The bulk of it goes to the school system in the county where the violation was recorded. I encourage you to have a special session with all your drivers to spread this information. Also, SEPA may develop a remedial training session as they did for wheel stop violations.

Our main goal is safety for your employees and the public. We do not want to assess penalties, but we know penalties get the attention of violators. This is another situation where the driver can "watch out for number one" for safety and financial wellness. 

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Berico Celebrates


100 YEARS

>> In February and all of 2024, Berico will be celebrating its 100-year anniversary in the triad community. Evolving from what was originally “Berry Coal” company in 1924, today Berico has expanded in the fuel, propane, lubricant, and HVAC industries. Over the years, Berico has grown its portfolio through organic growth as well as multiple acquisitions. Today, Berico’s 113 employees help serve the triad from three locations in Greensboro, Burlington, and Eden. Additionally, Berico’s wholesale fuel company, Gateco Oil Co., maintains a terminal position at Greensboro’s fuel terminals.

Berico upholds William N. Berry’s motto of “Always Dependable,” as proven by its multiple Reader’s Choice Awards, BBB Torch Award for Ethics, and its generosity to the community. Particularly, Berico’s “Gift of Warmth” program helps raise (and match) donations to help support those in need of heat each winter.

Founded by William N. Berry, the company has successfully transitioned into its 4th generation of family ownership. After William N. Berry, the company was owned and operated by Joseph L. Berry, who was succeeded by the late John F. Fuquay and current CEO, Thomas A. Berry. In 2011, current President Will Berry joined as a 4th generation Berry leader.



“We are extremely proud to enter our 100th year supporting customers in the triad. I give credit to our great staff over the years, previous leadership, and dedication to our community for helping us reach this great milestone!” said President Will Berry. 

Submitted by: Will Berry, President, and Thomas A. Berry, CEO.

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What's My 2023 TAX BRACKET?

BY DEREK CARAWAN, AAMS, CPFA, PRESIDENT - CARAWAN FINANCIAL PARTNERS



Every year, the IRS evaluates and typically adjusts certain tax provisions to account for inflation. Below is the IRS's latest adjustments for the 2023 tax year—including tax brackets and standard deductions.¹

This material is for informational purposes only and is not a replacement for real-life advice, so make sure to consult your tax, legal, and accounting professionals before modifying your tax strategy. 🔥

10%

- Single: Up to \$11,000
- Married Filing Jointly: Up to \$22,000
- Married Filing Separately: Up to \$11,000
- Head of Household: Up to \$15,700

12%

- Single: \$11,001 to \$44,725
- Married Filing Jointly: \$22,001
- Married Filing Separately: \$89,450
- Head of Household: \$15,701 to \$59,850

22%

- Single: \$44,726 to \$95,375
- Married Filing Jointly: \$89,451 to \$190,750
- Married Filing Separately: \$44,726 to \$95,375
- Head of Household: \$59,851 to \$95,350

24%

- Single: \$95,376 to \$182,100
- Married Filing Jointly: \$190,751 to \$364,200
- Married Filing Separately: \$95,376 to \$182,100
- Head of Household: \$95,351 to \$182,100

32%

- Single: \$182,101 to \$231,250
- Married Filing Jointly: \$364,201 to \$462,500
- Married Filing Separately: \$182,101 to \$231,250
- Head of Household: \$182,101 to \$231,250

35%

- Single: \$231,251 to \$578,125
- Married Filing Jointly: \$462,501 to \$639,750
- Married Filing Separately: \$230,251 to \$346,100
- Head of Household: \$231,251 to \$578,100

37%

- Single: Over \$578,125
- Married Filing Jointly: Over \$693,750
- Married Filing Separately: Over \$346,875
- Head of Household: Over \$578,100

2023 Standard Deduction Amounts

Single:

\$13,850

Married Filing Jointly:

\$27,700

Married Filing Separately:

\$13,850

Head of Household:

\$20,800

1. IRS.gov, 2022

Source: www.carawanfp.com/resource-center/tax/whats-my-tax-bracket/?utm_source=social-foundations&utm_medium=url-shortener

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