

A nanny to watch over your propane tank

Norwell man invents, markets a protector to watch over your propane tank

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With a pencil and a napkin at Dunkin' Donuts, Earl Cogswell Jr. drew his idea for a device to keep a propane tank from tipping over in the backseat of a car.

Then he scanned it into his computer so that he could e-mail the drawing to his daughter Jessica and her boyfriend Tony Smith in California. "It didn't come out very well, with all the wrinkles, but we got the gist of it," Smith said.

Three years later, Cogswell's idea has become the Tank Nanny, a round plastic device that holds a propane tank and can be buckled into a car seat. He said it has been tested at up to 30 miles per hour.



Cogswell spent many years working at Sullivan Tire, where he said he learned to think on his feet and solve problems. Several years ago, he left to help his father-in-law run Dick's Power Equipment in Hanover. One of the first things the Norwell resident noticed was the problem people had securing the propane tanks they brought to be filled.

"People were using all kinds of different configurations to try to fasten the propane tank into their vehicles," he said.

Though he said there have been no known explosions caused by a tank falling over, the metal tanks do scratch and leave rust on car interiors. He wanted to create something simple that would give people confidence when transporting propane.

After the first sketch, Cogswell fleshed out the details of the device with his family and an engineering firm in Attleboro. The design had to be simple enough to reproduce in a mold, and light enough for people to carry easily.

With repeated testing, Cogswell decided on a device that is 20 inches in diameter and 9½ inches high, made of up to 80 percent recycled plastic. He found a company to build the prototype, and then a company to manufacture the products – all within the U.S.

And they decided on the name. “We wanted you to think that somebody was watching out for your propane tank, the way that a nanny watches out for the kids,” said Cogswell. “And we wanted it to be fun.”