

## Tech Article

# How the IPA Shortage Affects Fiber Cleaning Practices

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Rick Hoffman, Sticklers™ National Accounts Manager.



IPA was never the recommended cleaning agent for fiber end faces anyway. Now that there's an IPA shortage, can technicians turn this dilemma into an opportunity?

*Cabling Installation and Maintenance* Magazine caught up with Rick Hoffman, Sticklers™ National Accounts Manager, to ask about the IPA (Isopropyl Alcohol) shortages due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hoffman does not recommend using IPA for fiber cleaning for a number of reasons. And now that IPA is difficult to source, he recommends fiber installers and maintenance technicians switch to better IPA alternatives.

For years experts have been telling fiber-optic technicians not to use isopropyl alcohol (IPA) to clean fiber end faces. Some technicians have listened; some haven't. Today, one of COVID-19's many effects on global commerce is the scarcity of IPA. We spoke with Sticklers national accounts manager Rick Hoffman about the IPA shortage and its practical impact on fiber cleaning.

### Short Supply

*Q: Isopropyl alcohol (IPA) is in short supply as the world battles the COVID-19 pandemic. Is the shortage simply a matter of demand overwhelming supply, or do any other factors (such as supply chain) also contribute?*

A: The IPA shortage was caused initially by the sudden demand. Overnight, every factory, office, facility and home wanted IPA and IPA-based products to wipe down and disinfect surfaces. This is in addition to the increased need for IPA within the global healthcare sector. This abrupt demand has overwhelmed the entire supply chain, and depending on how long the COVID-19 virus remains a threat, it may be months before IPA becomes readily available. Sticklers Fiber Optic Splice and Connector Cleaner does not absorb impurities from the air. IPA does.

*Q: Do you have insight, or an opinion, on the mid- to long-term outlook for IPA supply?*

A: Isopropyl alcohol supplies will continue to be tight in the upcoming months. But as IPA manufacturers ramp up their output, we should see supply open up incrementally. However, the price of IPA has quadrupled, fueled by the increased demand and short supply. The days of relatively inexpensive IPA pricing will likely not come back for years.

### Better Alternatives

*Q: IPA is not the best for cleaning fiber end faces because of its relative ineffectiveness compared to other tools and fluids. What are some better alternatives to using IPA?*

A: There are some really good alternatives to IPA for cleaning fiber optics. Many of them clean just as well, if not better than alcohol. For instance, the Sticklers™ Fiber Optic Splice & Connector Cleaner. It cleans end faces and fiber splices exceptionally well without leaving residue behind. It doesn't absorb impurities from the air like IPA can, so you get more thorough cleaning. Plus, it evaporates eight times faster than IPA, so it saves installers cleaning time.

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Sticklers™ Fiber Optic Splice & Connector Cleaner is preferred over alcohol.



The 3 oz. can of Sticklers™ Fiber Optic Splice & Connector Cleaner is allowed in a carry-on bag.



But the Sticklers™ Fiber Optic Splice & Connector Cleaner also has other advantages over IPA. It's nonflammable, so it is safer to use out in the field. Also, it comes in a hermetically sealed can. That ensures the high purity cleaning fluid is clean. It also means it won't spill if it tips over in a tool kit or while in use. Plus, it delivers the cleaning fluid in metered doses so it reduces operator exposures and waste.

Most importantly, the Sticklers™ Fiber Optic Splice & Connector Cleaner is non-regulated and non-hazardous. That means installers can safely travel with the fluid on their vehicles without worry. They can even put the 3-oz. can into their carry-on bag if they need to fly to their job site.

*Q: Are these other fiber-cleaning products also in short supply?*

A: The Sticklers™ Fiber Optic Splice & Connector Cleaner is in-stock and ready to ship. Since the cleaning fluid is not IPA-based, it is plentiful and not impacted by the frenzied global demand for IPA. A telecommunications technician working outside, away from other individuals, is at lower risk of being exposed to COVID-19 than workers in many other environments.

## COVID-19 Challenges

*Q: MicroCare, parent company of the Sticklers™ brand, serves cleaning needs across many industries. Can you share insight into the challenges that face telecommunications technicians, compared to or contrasted with the challenges that other industries face?*

A: Fortunately, most telecommunications teams are outdoors or inside secure rooms where there are minimal numbers of people operating. This is a safer environment than on factory floors, in hospitals, or at other building structures that house many more people. The less people in the fiber technician's area, the less chance of exposure the COVID-19 virus. This, of course, doesn't mean they can be less vigilant about wearing masks and washing their hands as recommended by the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). It is also a good idea for technicians to wipe down any work surfaces with a general-purpose cleaning wipe before starting any fiber work. This helps remove any contaminant that might be lurking on the work surface.



The outdoor aspect of some fiber work means less chance of exposure to the COVID-19 virus.

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