

Scalds And Burns Are Preventable Injuries

The Office of State Fire Marshal wants Oregonians to know that scalds are the leading cause of burn injuries to all ages, particularly children under five and older adults. Hot liquids are one of the top causes of burn admissions at the Oregon Burn Center. Over 80 percent of the burns to children under eight years old are caused by hot liquids. Seniors are also at high risk for scald injuries which are usually a direct result of a hot water heater temperature setting above 120 degrees.

The severity of scald injuries is often underestimated. Hot liquids can cause first, second, or third degree burns, depending on the temperature and length of exposure.

Very young children and older adults are more susceptible to burns and scalds because their skin is thinner. People who have diabetes can be less sensitive to heat increasing the possibility of burns. Some people with disabilities may find it hard to recognize when something is too hot. Special precautions are needed to avoid scalds and burns.

The greatest number of scald burns occur at home in the kitchen and bathroom. Common causes are accidental contact with hot liquid and immersion in scalding water. Common causes of contact burns are from heating sources, hot appliances, cooking, corrosive chemicals, microwaved foods, and highly flammable fuels.

Some tips to prevent scalds and contact burns are:

- Keep children at a safe distance from all hot liquids.
- Use table placemats instead of a tablecloth with small children, keep hot foods in the center of the table.
- While cooking around children, turn pot handles to the back of the stove and if possible cook on the rear burners.
- Place appliances out of children's reach and far back from counter edges. Make sure the cords are not dangling over the edge of the counter or table.
- Reduce water heater temperatures to 120 degrees or lower.
- Always test bath water before bathing. 100 degrees is recommended for infants.
- Never leave young children alone in the bathtub. Install a hot water safety device on the bathtub to avoid accidental scalding.
- People with medical conditions should check for signs of blisters or redness that could be caused by scalds or contact burns.

First aid for hot liquid burns:

- Quickly remove any clothing that could keep the hot liquid in contact with the skin and cause further burning.
- Immerse the burn in cool water immediately for 10 to 15 minutes to stop the burning process and reduce pain.
- DO NOT apply ice since it may increase tissue damage.
- DO NOT apply butter, Vaseline, ointments or plastic wrap since these may retain heat and invite infection.
- DO NOT break blisters. This will increase the possibility for infection.
- Seek immediate medical treatment for any large, deep burn.
- Reduce shock from serious burns by covering the victim with a clean sheet and then with a blanket for warmth.

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Outdoor Cooking Safety

As we approach Memorial Day weekend and the summer months, State Fire Marshal Nancy Orr urges Oregonians to be fire safe when cooking outside. To reduce the chances of an outdoor cooking-related fire or injury, Orr recommends the following safety tips:

- Make sure the barbecue is in a safe area away from children, pets and anything that can burn.
- Store matches and lighters up and away from children.
- Don't be tempted by a rainy day to use outdoor cooking equipment inside – not even in the garage. You may be overcome by carbon monoxide gas, resulting in injury and death.

Extra care is needed for gas grills:

- Check all gas line connections to make certain they are tight and properly secured. Carefully bend the grill's flexible line and check it for cracks. Make sure there are no sharp bends in the hose or tubing.
- If you smell a gas odor around a propane tank, immediately turn off the gas and don't attempt to light the grill until the leak is fixed.
- If your propane grill uses a one to ten gallon cylinder, make sure the cylinder has an overfill protection device.
- Always light the match before you turn on the gas.

Charcoal grills:

- Once a fire has been started, never add starter fluid. Fire may follow the stream of fluid back to the container, causing an explosion and scattering flaming liquid.
- Use caution disposing of ashes. Ashes may contain hot embers, which can start a fire if not disposed of properly. Place ashes in a covered metal container and put outdoors away from anything that can burn.

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Electrical Fires Can Be Prevented

Electrical fires occur all too often in Oregon. Short circuits in electrical systems and overloaded circuits are some of the most frequently reported causes of residential fires. However, steps can be taken to reduce the chance of an electrical fire. State Fire Marshal Nancy Orr encourages all Oregonians to take a moment to check their home for electrical fire hazards.

"Electrical systems age and wear out the same as other parts of a home," says State Fire Marshal Orr. "These systems should not be taken for granted. An electrical system can safely furnish service provided you check its condition regularly, and have it improved and repaired when problems are found."

Here are some danger signs to look for:

- Is your electrical panel or fuse box warm to the touch, making a sizzling or buzzing noise, or have a strange odor? If yes, immediately contact a licensed electrician for repair.
- Are outlets or switches warm after use? If yes, discontinue use of the outlet or switch immediately. Contact a licensed electrician for repair.
- Are fixtures, outlets, or switches damaged or broken? Replace damaged and broken items, or contact a licensed electrician for help. Be sure to turn off the power supply before making repairs.
- Are connections from the wiring to switches and outlets tight? Again, make sure you turn off the power supply to the switch or outlet before tightening or touching.
- Is your home more than 15 years old? At this age, an electrical inspection is advisable, especially if more appliances and lights have been added to the home.

"Another important thing you can do to keep your family safe is to make a home escape plan, practice it regularly and have working smoke alarms on every level of your home, outside each sleeping area and in every bedroom," says Orr.

For more information about electrical safety, call a licensed electrician, your local fire department or the Office of State Fire Marshal, 503-373-1540, ext. 266.