

Burns: Safety and awareness



It is estimated that more than 200 000 people die as a result of burns. Most of them in middle to low income countries according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). These burns occur in the home and workplace, and are often preventable.

Most common locations for burns

According to WHO, 80-90% of burns occur at home. The people most at risk are generally women and children, with burns occurring as a result of hot liquids, flames, or cooking-related explosions from within a domestic kitchen. Men are most likely to be burned in the work environment as a result of fire, scalding, and chemical or electrical burns.

What can we do to prevent burns from occurring?

Having a working smoke alarm at home and work is important. Having an escape plan is vital too, such as marking emergency exits (at least two) in every room, having fire extinguishers and fire blankets at home and at work, as well as a first-aid kit at home with products to treat burns.

Safety measures: Oil, electricity, and gas

- **Never add water onto burning oil**, such as when cooking oil catches fire. Rather smother the flames by placing a lid on the pan or pot. Adding water to an oil fire can result in an explosion. Baking powder can also help to smother the flames, as well as a wet cloth.
- **Don't overload electrical circuits**. Be careful of using long extensions to other buildings, especially if it crosses a street as it can lead to a fire or electrocution.
- **Don't use any electrical appliances with wet**

hands. Keep these out of areas where there is water, such as the bathroom or by a pool.

- **Unplug appliances you aren't using**, especially heaters and irons.
- **Don't try to dry clothes on your heater**. Keep your heater 1m away from items that could catch fire such as furniture, curtains, and clothing.
- **Remember gas is flammable**. If you smell gas, switch off the appliance immediately and open all windows and doors and do not smoke. Piped gas cylinders (such as in a stove) must be installed and maintained by a certified and qualified technician.
- **Don't use flammable liquid like paraffin to start a braai**.

Be careful when smoking. Always extinguish a cigarette properly to avoid house and field fires. Also don't smoke near anything flammable such as an oxygen tank, nail polish, hairspray, or petrol.

Fireworks can also be hazardous and cause burns and other serious injury to people and animals so always practise safety first. Sparklers are potentially hazardous and can reach a temperature of 500 degrees. Don't give fireworks to children or light them near animals and don't try to light ones that have malfunctioned.

Be vigilant of safety at home and at work to prevent risk of burns.