



Campfires are a central part of Scouting events and the Scouting experience. Not only do they provide heat for warmth and cooking, but a campfire is also a central part of Scouting activities on campouts, at summer camp, and during evening ceremonies. Fires in friendly confines offer many benefits, but when the BSA Unit Fireguard Plan and Chemical Fuels and Equipment Policy are not properly observed, fires can have tragic results to property and life. The following incidents can help increase awareness of the need for fire prevention and safety as described in the Unit Fireguard Plan.

Incident Review #1

A Scout suffered second-degree burns when his nylon pants caught fire as a campfire was being lit and a bottle of liquid fuel for stoves was dropped into the flames. A second Scout kicked the now lit bottle out of the campfire ring, but it came in contact with the first Scout. The second Scout then used “stop/drop/and roll” procedures to assist the first Scout and helped extinguish the flames from the nylon pants. More Scouts administered first aid.

Key Points

- Using liquid fuels for starting any type of fire—including lighting damp wood, charcoal, and ceremonial campfires or displays—is prohibited.
- Before any chemical fuels or chemical fueled equipment is used, an adult who is knowledgeable about chemical fuels and equipment, including industry regulatory requirements, should resolve any hazards not specifically addressed in the chemical fuels policy.

Incident Review #2

An 11-year-old Scout received burns to her face and smoke inhalation from a fire that was not properly extinguished and had escaped a fire ring during very windy conditions. The Scout’s tent caught on fire where she was sleeping.

Key Points

- All cooking fires, heating fires, and campfires are to be thoroughly extinguished when unattended. Put a fire “cold out” by stirring water over the coals to ensure no hot spots remain.
- It is the job of the camp fire warden and assigned deputies to post the fireguard plan in each campsite, to train and orient all Scouts, and to ensure all points of the plan are implemented.
- The fire warden and deputies makes sure fires are built on non-combustible soil in areas where they will not spread. Fires and open flames are not permitted near or in tents.





Incident Review #3

A bonfire was presumably put cold out. All remains appeared cold to the touch, and the remains were then carried off the field and placed in the edge of the woods. A fire later developed, and the county fire marshal and the forestry service determined the ignition source was a log that was removed from the bonfire. Due to high winds, the internal embers in the log had remained warm enough to work out of the log and become an ignition source. A wood-framed barn with equipment and two acres were consumed by fire.

Key Points

- While the cold-out method of extinguishing was used, the remains, including logs, were transported to the edge of the woods where additional combustible matter was located. A combination of high winds, a large log with embedded live embers, and the adjacent combustibles created an environment where the fire could reignite.
- As part of the cold-out method, ensure all hot spots are extinguished with water and that the area around the ashes is non-combustible.
- Large logs can require extra attention to make sure they are out. Even if the log is cool to the touch on the outside, look for smoke from internal smoldering, and carefully use a shovel to expose embers.
- While not discussed in the fireguard plan or Guide to Safe Scouting, high winds should always be a consideration along with other weather-related conditions such as very dry or drought conditions. Many areas institute burn bans during such conditions, and the local county, area forest, or camp management should be contacted prior to starting campfires.

Discussion Questions

- Are members of each unit trained in the unit fireguard plan, and are the unit fire warden and deputies assigned their responsibilities in accordance with the plan?
- Is the unit's fireguard plan posted in the unit campsite?
- Have unit adult and youth leaders reviewed the Guide to Safe Scouting, specifically including the section on chemical fuels and equipment?

Resources

- Guide to Safe Scouting—Chemical Fuels and Equipment, www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/gss06/
- BSA Unit Fire Guard Plan, www.scoutshop.org/unit-fireguard-plan-chart-616620.html#.WnlwjraZPOQ
- BSA Safety Moment—Charcoal Safety, www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safety-moments/charcoal-safety/
- Bryan on Scouting—10 Fire Safety Tips That Could Save Your Life, blog.scoutingmagazine.org/2014/08/01/chemical-fuels-approved-arent/

