BSA SAFETY INCIDENT REVIEW: BURNS TO YOUTH

Incident Review #1
Three youth and a parent were burned when a container of HEET® ignited in the hand of a den leader, who then dropped it in a campfire and splashed the three boys. This happened while they were trying to make green flames with borax cleaner and alcohol to promote STEM Scouting at a recruiting event. The idea came from a non-BSA website. The victims were transported by helicopter to a burn center.

Key Points
- Pouring alcohol or any other flammable liquid or accelerant on a campfire is not part of the Scouting program.
- HEET®, which contains alcohol, has never been intended as a fuel or fire starter. It is a gas-line antifreeze and water remover. The manufacturer does not condone use of the product for any other purpose.

Incident Reviews #2 and #3
Two Scouts were burned while lighting a homemade stove. They had made the stove out of a soda can and were trying to fuel it with HEET®. The boys could not see the flame starting in the can, and they poured more fuel onto it, causing an explosion. Both boys were taken by air ambulance to a burn center.

Two youth guests, 13 and 2 years old, were burned when a flash fire started on a homemade alcohol-burning stove. One youth suffered third-degree burns and was life-flighted to a hospital.

Key Points
- By design, the BSA's Chemical Fuels and Equipment policy limits the use of any chemical-fueled equipment “that is handcrafted, homemade, modified, or installed beyond the manufacturer's stated design limitations or use. Examples include alcohol-burning 'can' stoves, smudge pots, improperly installed heaters, and propane burners with their regulators removed.”
- In these and other incidents involving liquid alcohol fuels, additional fuel added to a burning stove has been a factor. Alcohol typically burns with a clean or blue flame and is difficult to see in daylight. Even commercially manufactured stoves need to cool before refueling.
- In incident #3, the guests were daughters of the Scoutmaster. Siblings participating in program when they are not part of the unit can be a distraction, and they may not be aware of the unit’s methods.
Discussion Questions

- What risks or hazards are common to fires or to the use of chemically-fueled equipment?
- All of the incidents involved injured youth. What techniques could have been used to prevent endangering their safety? What risks would have been reduced, and what risks would have remained?
- How does the BSA’s Chemical Fuels and Equipment policy help to prevent burns?
- What supervision should unit leaders provide when a program or activity includes fires?
- What key points should be remembered when planning such activities?

Resources

BSA’s Chemical Fuels and Equipment policy, 
www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/gss06

Unit Fireguard Chart, No. 33691

Boy Scout Handbook—Tools chapter