



# Naval Safety Center

## LESSONS LEARNED



LL 21-29

### AUTUMN FIRES

#### *"Fire, no good." — Frankenstein's Monster*

Autumn is upon us, and what better way to enjoy the cooler temps than with backyard fires, holiday cooking, and cool-weather grilling (*because there is no off-season for the serious griller, right?*). While the instances of outdoor fires decrease in the fall, indoor fires from heating and cooking rise during cold months. Whatever the activity or the season, Burns Hurt! The American Burn Association states that an average of 450,000 people are treated in hospitals for burns each year, and burns are the third leading cause of death in the home, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Read and learn from the pain of your fellow service members, lest you too, get burned.



- Burning Man. A Sailor was attempting to light a pile of tree limbs and brush from a land-clearing operation on his property. He decided to pour "multiple gallons of gasoline on the pile," which pooled at least a gallon or so by his feet. After waiting a couple of minutes, the Sailor lit the fuel (*actually, he lit the massive vapor cloud around him*), and a flash burn ignited. He received first and second-degree burns and spent 11 days on light duty, wondering what happened. — *It's the gasoline vapors that burn folks, not the liquid; and at a lower flash point. We've said it in previous lessons: **Please stop using gasoline to light fires!***

- Out of Gas? After a Sailor lit his propane grill, he went inside to let it warm up. When he returned to check the temperature, his grill read 0 degrees Fahrenheit. Hmm. He checked the gauge on the tank, and it read empty. The Sailor unhooked the tank, at which point the hose from the tank "started spewing propane." As he attempted to shut off the tank, the propane ignited, and a fireball engulfed him while he was crouched down. His spouse ran outside and grabbed a fire extinguisher to subdue the fire so the tank could be shut off. She then drove him to the emergency room, where he was diagnosed with first and second-degree burns to the face, legs, and arms. — *Thank goodness for his quick thinking spouse! Don't let the zero on the gauge fool you; there could still be propane left in the tank. Secure all valves first, then disconnect.*

- With a Single Bound. A Sailor was at the community pool when he observed a small child head toward a charcoal grill and pick up a bottle of lighter fluid (*Yikes!*). The child seemed to be unsupervised as the parents were not around. The Sailor observed the child begin to spray lighter fluid on the grill, and he immediately sprang up to intervene. When he moved the child out the way, the grill flared up, and flames made contact with the Sailor's face. He received minor burns to his face, nose, lips, and ear, saving the child from a similar fate in the process. — *BZ to this attentive and responsive Sailor who may have saved a life and certainly saved a child from serious injury. Parents, attend to your children, especially around a lit grill ... and a pool!*

- Alcohol, The Blue Threat. While drinking alcohol at the barracks, a Marine stumbled into a fire pit. Thankfully a corpsman was present, because the Marine needed to be admitted to the hospital and treated for second-degree burns to his face and neck. The Marine was held overnight due to concerns his tongue might swell from the burns and obstruct his breathing. — *This overindulgent Marine had an additional 14 days SIQ to contemplate his alcohol-related incident. Fire or no fire, drinking to excess is never a good choice.*

## AUTUMN FIRES

- Choose Your Friends Wisely. A Marine was standing next to a pile of wood that had gasoline poured on it when a “friend” threw a flaming bottle (a.k.a. *Molotov cocktail*) at the pile. As expected, the flaming bottle ignited the gasoline-soaked woodpile with a monstrous “FOOM!” causing second-degree burns on the Marine’s arm and first-degree burns on his neck and face. — *In the friend’s defense, he didn’t see the Marine standing next to the woodpile, but using a Molotov cocktail to start a fire is not the safest method (as demonstrated here). Fire is already dangerous enough without getting creative on lighting methods. Keep it simple, please. And stop using gasoline!*
- Order Up! A Sailor was preparing hot oil in order to cook french fries. He heated the oil in a pan and, when he began to immerse the frozen fries in the oil, a giant fireball erupted and engulfed the Sailor’s arm. His roommate helped to put out the flames and called 911. At the hospital, he was treated for second-degree burns on 90 percent of his right arm. — *Cooking fires and burns increase in the fall, especially around the holidays. If fried food is on the menu, make sure you don’t overfill the pan and that the oil is heated to the proper temperature. And ease those fries into the oil.*
- ♪Chim Chimney, Chim Chim...♪ A Sailor returned home to find her house was filled with smoke. She soon discovered the source was her wood-pellet stove’s chimney, which was clogged and returning smoke, carbon monoxide, and other harmful gases back into the home. In a possible underestimation of the amount of toxic gases still in the house, the Sailor chose to remain in the home overnight. She was treated the next day for carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. — *According to the Centers for Disease Control, there are more than 430 deaths from CO poisoning and an average of 50,000 people are treated in hospitals for CO poisoning annually. Our Sailor was fortunate she was in the treatment-only column of those stats. Make sure your chimney is cleared this fall before your first fire.*

### Key Takeaways / Lessons Learned

The key takeaways here are eerily similar to those in our Backyard Fires Lesson Learned, LL 19-25. Why? Because some of our Sailors and Marines didn’t receive the lesson, or they chose to ignore it. For those who need a reminder, here are the lessons from Autumn Fires...again.

1. **Gasoline is for your car, not your fire pit.** This one seems to bear repeating the most. We had so many examples of gasoline fires gone wrong that it was hard to choose which ones to use. The ones we left out included starting a charcoal grill (*Yuck!*) and pouring gasoline on an already burning fire (*Nooooo!*). All we can say now is, please learn how to start a fire without using gasoline.
2. **Manage your backyard fire area wisely.** Keeping pets and children at a safe distance, and actively monitoring your fire pit or grill is a good start. Most municipalities have regulations on the size and location of outdoor fire areas. The average maximum size for fire pits is four feet wide or diameter, and the limit is similar for open outdoor fires. Even if you’re not in a regulated area, consider the size of your fire and your ability to contain it. And please, PLEASE, don’t put any flammable liquids near or on the fire.
3. **Alcohol and fire are not compatible elements.** Tired of hearing what not to do while drinking? Us too. We get it; having a few libations around the bonfire is a popular way to spend some well-deserved off-duty time with family and friends. Leave the fire tending to a sober and responsible person. Open fires are no place for “hold my beer.” Drink and make fire responsibly, and look out for your friends and family while you’re there.

**And remember, “Let’s be careful out there”** 

This product is posted on the NAVSAFECEN public website at <https://www.NavalSafetyCenter.navy.mil>.

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