



Building a cooking fire is an important skill for a Boy Scout to develop. After all, who doesn't love a glowing campfire at the end of a great day outdoors? These reviews look at incidents where something went wrong involving fire. As you read and discuss them, focus on lessons that can be learned to prevent similar occurrences.

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

