

Fire_Hazards_1995.txt

~From: Kevin
~æSubject: More Fire Hazards
~æDate: Sun, 2 Apr 1995 19:50:20 +0000

Having just read the 'Fire Hazards' thread, I can't tell you just how important they are - read every word!

A few years ago, during a Chief Scouts Challenge hike along Hadrians Wall in Northumberland, England, we had an unfortunete inncident, when one of lesser experienced of us changed a Camping Gaz cylinder next to another stove. The explosion threw him back into the tent, and inginited the tent fabric! The fabric melted like plastic, and only missed him by a few inches! He was only slightly injured (though he had to go to hospitol), but the 100 tent was destroyed.

Since then our scouts have been trained to change a gas cylinder And, as some of the older scouts can remember how white our faces were when we returned from the fire scene, they know that if they don't know how to change a cylinder they should leave it to a leader who does.

So read the Fire Hazards thread - or it could be your life, or, maybe even worse, the life of one of the people under your responsibility.

Yours in Scouting
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Kevin 'Randlay Rebel' Wright

Article #R87.

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Fire Hazards
Gerry
The Leader, June/July 1984

A True Story

A few years ago, a young Scout was building a cooking fire. He decided to help his cause somewhat by adding a little naphtha. The fire ignited. He decided to add a little more, to get the fire really established.

The gas exploded. The Scout suffered second and third degree burns to his hands, arms, face and chest. Badly injured and in shock, he spent a few critical days in hospital. He needed two skin grafts and a long period of recovery.

This accident happened despite warnings from the adult leaders that using white gas to start a fire was a dangerous practice.

Fire hazards are no joke. We have a tendency to believe accidents will never happen in our camp. Until, that is, we experience a tragedy like the one described.

All leaders want their camping experiences to be safe and successful. The leaders in charge in this case felt the same way. I'm sure they looked long and hard at their experience and took steps to assure it wouldn't happen again.

One thing is certain. Words are not enough. The only effective way to limit the chances of similar tragedies is to build regular safety practices into your camp routines. There are a number of situations

where an ounce of prevention is worth much more than a pound of cure.

Firelighting

Any Scout can take pride in mastering the art of laying and lighting a good fire. start small and dry, use one match and, slowly, build up to the size you need.

Never use naphtha or white gas to start a fire. Naphtha vaporizes very quickly. When the vapours mix with air, the situation is explosive. The boy in our true story already had started the fire. It heated the added gas and sent explosive fumes towards him. The flames ignited the gas.

There are times when Scouters want to use a gimmick to light a campfire in a special way. If you do use fuel, I suggest a rag soaked with a bit of kerosene. Although kerosene vaporizes much more slowly than other gas fuels, take care and make sure participants stand well clear.

Tent Warmer

We all hate to crawl into a damp tent and sleeping bag at night. For some people, the answer is to take a lit lantern into the tent with them. Some people are pretty foolish. Even when everyone is warm and alert, it's very easy to knock over a lantern in a tent. Most of us know that a two-man tent can melt or burn to ashes in 15 to 30 seconds. That's not enough time to think, let alone get out of your bag, find the door, unzip and get out.

When the weather is damp, roll up your sleeping bag to keep it dry. Your body will warm it quickly once you crawl into it and you won't

notice the damp air in your tent. If you feel a nip at your ears, put on a hat.

If it's absolutely necessary to warm up your tent and bag, place the lit lantern securely on a platform on the floor of the tent, and then get out. Remove it from a two-man tent after two or three minutes, put it out, crawl into the tent and let the sleeping bag do the rest.

Stoves and Fuel

You can't work a stove without fuel, but we often choose the darndest times and places to put fuel into the beast. Before you fuel, make sure the stove is out and cool. Never refuel when a stove is still hot.

Fill up away from any open flame or lit stove. Use a funnel to avoid spilling fuel.

Keep fuel cartridges away from heat, especially the spent one you've just removed. Empty cartridges always contain a residue. Fumes may escape, vaporize and ignite if there is a flame nearby.

Despite taking the best precautions when installing a new cartridge, it's possible to break the seal accidentally and release gas under pressure. A nearby flame will ignite the quickly vaporizing fuel with explosive results.

Keep the size of the pot on a single burner stove to 30 cm (12") diameter or less. Particularly when you've sheltered the stove from wind, larger pots may trap the stove heat so that it warms the controls and the fuel container. If you touch hot controls, you may tip the stove and cause a fire. If the heat builds up too high, pressure in the fuel container may spray out fuel through the safety

valve or, even worse, blow off the bottom of the fuel container.

An Ounce of Prevention

Work these safety practices into your camping routine.

1. Keep camp fuel in safe leak-free containers and store in a safe location away from tents, brush, cooking or firepit areas. Keep proper funnels available.
2. Make it a camp rule to fill stoves only at the fuel depot, and only if you can pick up the stove by the burner plate.
3. Train all your campers to light a fire and a stove properly. Make it a rule that campers will not be allowed to light a fire or stove without having demonstrated the ability and responsibility to do so safely.
4. Provide general supervision at all times. You can do this by working directly with inexperienced campers or by giving each camper a watchdog role. Based on your judgment, you might give patrol leaders, company executives or experienced boys and girls specific supervisory responsibilities.
5. Forbid cooking inside or beside tents. Allow no lanterns into tents to warm them unless absolutely necessary, and only when there's no one inside and an adult who is a competent camper handles the task.
6. Make it a specific expectation of all your campers that they will never use gas fuels to light fires. The only exception may be for a well planned campfire-lighting ceremony using kerosene only.
7. Know how to treat burns and extinguish fires. Have a useful first

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aid kit available in case an accident does occur.

By taking these precautions, you can keep the risks associated with fires and fuels at a minimum. It's the best way to ensure stories like the one that opened this piece will no longer be told.