

CAMPING AND FIRE SAFETY

Campfire burns accounted for 68% of recreational burns treated at Alberta Firefighters' burn units. Be extremely careful with your children when you are camping. It is very easy for a child to fall into a campfire. Remember, too, children (like adults) are often mesmerized by the open flames and will want to "play" with the fire by poking it with a stick or adding fuel to the flames. Teach your children to respect fire. Your lessons will be strengthened by your own example.

- Never leave children unsupervised around a campfire, even for a second. Ensure a proper adult/child ratio when groups gather around a campfire.
- Make a rule that bans horseplay close to a fire pit.
- When building a campfire, do not use gasoline as a starter. The flash flame from igniting fuel-soaked materials can reach several feet beyond the perimeters of the fire pit and severely injure bystanders.
- Build a fire suitable to the task at hand, and avoid huge bonfires when children are present. Always be alert to changing wind conditions and watch for flying sparks and embers. Keep away from the down wind side of a fire.
- In addition to flash and flame burns, children are at risk for severe contact burns, particularly at campfires built in sand pits. Because ringed pits resemble sandboxes, many children mistake them for play equipment.
- Children need to be taught that the stones ringing a fire pit become extremely hot and can not only burn little hands, but melt the bottoms of shoes. Be alert to hot coals and embers that may fly outside of the fire perimeter. This is a good reason to ban bare feet near a campfire.
- Often people extinguish pit fires by smothering them with sand. Unfortunately, this practice can create an oven in which coals continue to burn for hours. Children have sustained third degree burns that have required skin grafts after contact with the hot sand. Extinguish pit fires by dousing them with water, stirring the ashes, and pouring more water over the site. Repeat this procedure until the pit is completely extinguished.
- Most tents are very flammable. Fatalities have occurred when tents in which children were sleeping caught fire. Make sure children do not have matches or a lighter when they are "camping out."
- When cooking on a campfire, pick up pots and pans with a pot holder - and only after you know where bystanders are, in relationship to your planned path.
- When roasting marshmallows, assist young children. Never shake a flaming marshmallow – it could turn into a flying, flaming ball.

