

## Grassfires – protect yourself and your property

Victoria is increasingly experiencing urban spread and as a result more people are exposed to the risk of grassfire, often without knowing it. Fires this year in Epping, on Melbourne’s outskirts, have shown us that even people living in areas that are considered suburban can be at risk of grassfire.



Grassfires can spread quickly and are extremely dangerous. They can travel up to 25kph so you can’t out-run them. In the most extreme conditions grass fires have been known to pulse up to 60kph in open grassland. The taller the grass, the more intensely a grassfire will burn, so grass cut shorter than 10 centimetres creates a much lower risk.

***“Grassfires can spread quickly and are extremely dangerous. They can travel up to 25kph so you can’t out-run them.”***

How dry grass is affects how intensely a fire burns. Grass usually starts drying out in November when we start to see signs of yellowing; by January, grass is almost completely dry.

At this point, there is potential for widespread grassfires that can have devastating effects.

Although there is a perception that grassfires are not as serious as bushfires, they produce large amounts of radiant heat that can easily kill someone caught out in the open. A very intense grassfire can emit radiation up to 60,000 kilowatts per metre (kW/m). The threshold of pain for radiant heat on bare skin for most people is around 2kW/m so you can see that grassfires can be extremely hot. It is very important for people to wear protective clothing such as long sleeved shirt and pants made from natural fibre if they are at risk of exposure to radiant heat, but distance is always the best protection. The safest place to be during any bushfire or grassfire is well away from the fire. **Continued on page 2**

Burn injury is a significant component of the overall burden of injury in Australia with approximately 50,000 burns related hospital admissions per year.

The Victorian Burns Prevention Partnership (VBPP) aims to reduce the number of burn injuries and fatalities, especially among children. With 79% of child burn injuries occurring in the home, a lot can be done to prevent such injuries or minimise the extent of the injury. In this edition of *Stay Safe* you will discover the main causes of child burn injuries and how best to treat such injuries. There is an article on the hazards of hair straighteners and as the summer season approaches, our feature article is about the dangers of scrub and grass fires, even for those who live in urban areas!

### IN THIS ISSUE

Grassfires – protect yourself and your property.....	1
Hair straightener burns are preventable .....	2
Common causes of burn injury in children in Australia .....	3
First aid myths for burn injuries.....	3
<i>Stay Safe</i> activity page.....	4

# Hair straightener burns are preventable

**An increasing number of children are receiving burn injuries from accidentally touching hair straighteners. These injuries can range from minor to severe burns and may result in long term impairment and scarring. Hand injuries are most common however the head, the arms, feet and face are also typical areas of the body affected after contact with the heated surface of a hair straightener.**

In less than ten minutes a hair straightener can reach a dangerous 220°C, which is hot enough to fry an egg. This is hotter than an iron. This is twice as hot as boiling water in a kettle- hot enough to scar a child for life! Not only are they hazardous when switched on but hair straighteners remain dangerously hot for a long period of time even when switched off. It can take longer than 30 minutes for a hair straightener to return to a safe handling temperature. They remain dangerously hot for far longer than many parents realise. Young children who grab or fall onto a hair straighteners can suffer disfiguring injuries.

*“In less than ten minutes a hair straightener can reach a dangerous 220°C, which is hot enough to fry an egg.”*

A child's skin is 15 times thinner than an adult's and will burn at a lower temperature than adult skin. Some injuries need plastic surgery.

It is important to remember that when you have finished using a hair straightener, switch it off and unplug it. Slide it into a heat resistant bag and store it out of sight and out of reach immediately.

Take care not to burn yourself when using a straightener by ensuring you do not place the straightener too close to your scalp or ears.

In the case of a burn, hold injured area under cold running water for 20 minutes and seek medical attention.



## Grassfires – protect yourself and your property

*Continued from page 1*

Grassfires can start earlier in the day than bush fires as grass dries out more quickly than forest when temperatures are high. These fires can start quickly and spread rapidly, catching people by surprise.

It is important that you prepare and maintain your property for grassfire. This can be done by cutting grass and reducing bushes and other small plants near your house. Do not have any plants right next to your house. Doing this can reduce the ability of a grassfire to set fire to your house.

If you live near grassland or bush you need to have a Bushfire Survival Plan. For more information visit the CFA website [cfa.vic.gov.au](http://cfa.vic.gov.au) or call the Victorian Bushfire Information Line on 1800 240 667.

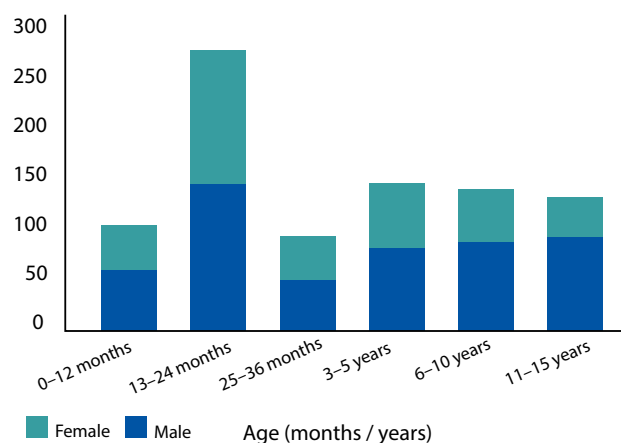
# The common causes of burn injury in children in Australia

**The Australian & New Zealand Burn Association (ANZBA) recently published its third annual report for the period July 1st 2011 – June 30 2012 profiling burn injuries across the two countries. The ANZBA Bi-National Burn Registry (Bi-NBR) collects data on paediatric and adult burn patients admitted to the 17 specialist burn centres throughout Australia & New Zealand.**

Children aged between 1 and 2 years old account for 33% of all paediatric injuries, identifying them as a high risk group. For children under 10 years old, scalds were the predominant cause of burns, whilst for children ages 11 to 15 years old flame burns were the predominant cause. 79% of burn injuries to children occurred in the home; in over 40% of cases the child was playing and in 20% of cases the child was near someone cooking.

The following graphs highlight some specific burn injury trends for children. This information is used by VBPP and other like organisations to fuel burns awareness campaigns. The report can be accessed via the ANZBA website at [www.anzba.org.au](http://www.anzba.org.au)

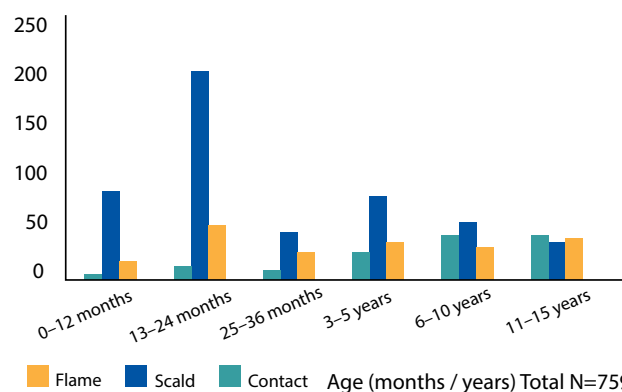
**Graph 1. Age distribution by gender – paediatric cases**



**Table 1. Most common sub-causes of burn injury in children**

Cause	Sub Cause	N	%
Scald	Hot beverages	168	19.7
Scald	Water from saucepan /kettle/jug/ billy/urn/ thermos	125	14.7
Scald	Food liquid/solid	65	7.6
Contact	Coals/Ashes	53	6.2
Flame	Campfire/bonfire/burnoff	47	5.5
Contact	Vehicle Exhaust	41	4.8
Friction	Treadmill	33	3.9
Scald	Water from tap/bath/shower	31	3.6
Flame	Lighter/matches	30	3.5
Scald	Fat/oil	23	2.7
Friction	Via vehicle/motorbike	20	2.3

**Graph 2. Frequency of flame, scald and contact burns by age group**



## First aid myths for burn injuries

**Adequate and timely first aid to a burn injury can minimise the extent of the injury. This can affect how long it takes a burn to heal, the need for surgery and importantly, long term scarring.**

**The current recommendation for first aid when a burn occurs is to place the injured area under cool running water for 20 minutes.**

Use of these products may actually do more harm than good. There is no scientific evidence to support the benefits of these methods for burn first aid and some of these products may actually deepen the burn when applied as first aid as they can seal in heat. However there is substantial scientific evidence that burns treated with 20 minutes of cool running water show improved healing rates in the two weeks following burn injury.

The 2011–2012 Bi-National Burns Registry data shows that cooling with water occurred in 88% of the paediatric cases and 90% in adult cases. But only 25% of children and 38% of the adults were cooled for the full 20 minutes and 12% had inappropriate first aid applied.

There are however many myths about what to use for first aid. These include:

- ✗ ice
- ✗ ice packs
- ✗ aloe vera
- ✗ butter, flour, egg whites
- ✗ toothpaste
- ✗ alternative methods of first aid





# Stay Safe

## ACTIVITY PAGE

Circle eight things that could be fixed to help make this home safer before the bushfire season.



**Answers:** Clean out gutters, mow lawns, clear away branches, fix tiles on roof, fit screens to all windows, store chemicals and flammable materials away from the house, move fire wood stack away from the house, plant trees further away from house

## COLOURING IN



Tanker

THIS EDITION OF STAY SAFE IS PROUDLY SPONSORED BY



• Prevention • Care • Research

