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U-M Health System launches anti-scald campaign

Elderly, children under the age of 5 at greatest risk for severe scald injuries

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ANN ARBOR, MI -Emma Brown was only a year old when she crawled into an empty bathtub to retrieve a toy and accidentally turned on the hot water faucet. Her babysitter was washing a load of laundry at the time, which caused the water temperature in the heating tank to spike and scalding water to pour into the bathtub with Emma in it. As a result, Emma suffered second- and third-degree burns. Now 11 years old, Emma has undergone 10 surgeries and is getting ready for another operation to correct her burn injuries.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN TRAUMA BURN CENTER

Emil Malaniak, a resident in a senior living facility, was showering when the warm water suddenly spiked to a scalding temperature. Unable to manipulate the shower valve, he attempted to shield himself with the shower curtain. But within seconds, he received second- and third- degree burns over his legs and feet, and later died from his injuries.

To prevent these scald burn injuries from occurring, the University of Michigan Trauma Burn Center is launching a scald injury prevention campaign to educate plumbing and building trade professionals, landlords and homeowners about how they can take action to stop these unnecessary and preventable burn injuries.

Each year, approximately 3,800 injuries and 34 deaths occur in homes in the United States due to scalding from excessively hot tap water, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. The majority of those injured are the elderly and children under the age of 5.

Severe damage to an adult's skin can occur in 30 seconds when exposed to water temperatures at 130 degrees Fahrenheit. However, it takes up to five minutes for a severe burn injury to occur if the hot water heating system is maintained and distributed at the recommended 120 F, allowing people time to react and remove themselves from the hot water.

According to Paul Taheri, M.D., MBA, Medical Director of the U-M Trauma Burn Center , “The exposure time for each temperature can be cut in half for children or the elderly because their skin is thinner and more sensitive. Also, they are unable to react as quickly due to their age or physical limitations.”

Instead of just setting the thermostat on the water heater to 120 F, the Trauma Burn Center recommends that anti-scald mechanical devices such as thermostatic mixing valves be installed near the water heater to mix the hot

and the cold water to deliver it at the safer temperature of 120 F. This is especially important when one system supplies hot water to numerous apartments or units.

In addition, anti-scald safety devices that limit the water flow to a trickle if it exceeds 120 F should be installed on showerheads and faucets. These products are inexpensive, easy to install and ideal for older homes and buildings built before code requirements for safe showers and bathtub temperature limits were in place.

Professionals who have the knowledge, ability and power to effect change that enforces existing codes, and promote safety should be made aware of these important scald prevention facts and devices. Passive devices, such as thermostatic mixing valves, can prevent scald injuries from occurring.

“It is important to bring awareness of the potential dangers related to scald injuries, “ says Jan Malaniak, Emil's daughter. “We want to alert others that our father's death could have been prevented had we known to inquire if proper anti-scald devices were in place in his assisted living facility.”

Important guidelines to prevent scalds burns :

- Check if your hot water heating system has anti-scald, temperature control devices installed.
- If in an apartment complex, nursing home, or assisted living facility, ask the landlord about temperature control devices and inspect them.
- Use a master mixing valve (ASSE 1017 approved), point-of-use temperature control device (ASSE 1016 approved) on shower valves, and maximum temperature limit stops on faucets and shower valves. These anti-scald devices can prevent water hotter than 120°F from ever reaching you.
- Set your hot water heater at 120 F.
- Make sure the plumbing work has been or is done through the local code official with all the necessary permits and inspections, by a licensed plumber.
- Make sure maintenance is done on hot water heating systems.
- Never leave a child alone while drawing water in a bathtub or bathing.
- Test the water temperature before bathing or showering. Be aware that without proper anti-scald devices, the water temperature can spike to scalding temperature.

For more information contact, Steffanie Samuels, Director, Marketing & Communications at 734-763-7757 or ssamuels@umich.edu . To learn more about the U-M Trauma Burn Center , visit www.traumaburn.org .

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