

ACCIDENT ALERT

Kitchen staff suffer serious burns

The dangers of using methylated spirits without proper safety procedures were highlighted in a recent incident.

The Incident

Three employees suffered serious burns as a result of a fire caused by methylated spirits in the kitchen of a restaurant recently.

Injuries were as follows:

- The head chef suffered burns to his face, arms and legs. His recovery period is expected to be about six months.
- A chef suffered burns to his left ear, part of face, neck, legs and right arm. His recovery period is expected to be about six weeks.
- A kitchen hand suffered burns to both ankles. Treatment was given at the time of the accident.

The accident occurred when the head chef was filling a burner for chaffing dishes with methylated spirits on top of a fridge next to the LPG stove. Because of the size of the container, some methylated spirits spilled and a fire started.

The Cause

No one was sure how the fire started. The 4-litre container that the methylated spirits was

held in was half full. When pouring the methylated spirits into the chaffing dish burner the vapours would have poured out into the immediate area that was exposed to temperatures of 30°C or higher. The work area was cramped. One of two possible sources of ignition may have started the fire. Either:

1. The four-burner LPG stove being left on or still being hot enough after being turned off to cause automatic ignition, or
2. Ignition from sparking electrical equipment.

The Action Taken

Following the accident, the restaurant discontinued the use of methylated spirits and began to use a jelly fuel.

If using methylated spirits, employers should ensure that:

- Methylated spirits is decanted into smaller, easier to handle containers before pouring into chaffing dish burners.
- Decanting is carried out, well away from any possible sources of ignition.
- Supplies of methylated spirits are properly stored away in approved containers.