Burn Injuries in Teen Restaurant Workers

A total of 104 restaurant and food service workers were hospitalized in Oklahoma burn centers for work-related burn injuries from 1988 to 2006. Eighteen (17%) of these workers were under 20 years of age. One-third of the burns involved more than 10% total body surface area. Burns and scalds may occur while teens are working as fry cooks, preparing or serving hot foods or drinks, cleaning dishes, and even delivering.

A 13-year-old female was helping at her parents’ restaurant. She tripped, slipped, and spilled hot grease on her body. She was hospitalized for 15 days with third degree burns over 10% of her body.

A 15-year-old male and a co-worker were handling a vat of hot grease. They did not coordinate the move well. Hot grease was splashed onto his face. He stayed in the hospital for two days.

A 16-year-old female was working at a restaurant when hot water in a pan spilled onto her. She received partial thickness burns over 13% of her body and spent six days in the hospital.

A 16-year-old male slipped on the floor and fell into a vat of hot oil while working at a fast food restaurant. He was treated in the hospital for three days.

A 17-year-old female backed into a deep fryer and splashed hot grease down her backside. She was hospitalized for six days with partial thickness burns over 7% of her body.

A 17-year-old male was carrying grease, slipped and fell, and poured hot grease on himself while cleaning at a fast food restaurant. He suffered burns over 25% of his body and was treated in the hospital for 20 days.

A 19-year-old female spilled a pot of hot coffee on her arm and chest while working at a restaurant. She had burns over 13% of her body and spent 17 days in the hospital.

A 19-year-old male was cooking french fries and sustained third degree burns. He was hospitalized for six days.

SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide teen workers workplace safety and first aid trainings before beginning work.
- Ensure that teen workers perform age appropriate work tasks.
- Keep working surfaces and floors uncluttered, clean, and dry. Clean up spills immediately.
- Wear fitted clothes, an appropriate apron, and sturdy non-slip, waterproof shoes.
- Use dry, thick, well-insulated potholders or oven mitts when handling hot food.
- Report all identified hazards to a supervisor immediately.