Holiday Safety

The holidays are a time to get together with family and friends. By practicing a few safety tips you can ensure a safe holiday season. Turkey-fryers are a popular method for cooking the holiday bird. However, they come with higher risks. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) reports there have been 168 turkey-fryer related fires, burns, explosions or carbon monoxide poisoning incidents since 2002. CPSC says 672 people have been injured and $8 million in property damage losses have resulted from these incidents.

Lights play a significant role in making the holidays festive. However, unattended candles are a big safety issue. The National Fire Protection Association reports 12% of home candle fires occur in December. Increased use of candles and fireplaces, combined with an increase in the amount of combustible, seasonal decorations present in many homes means more risk for fire. About 2,200 deaths were caused by fires, burns and other fire-related injuries in 2013, according to Injury Facts 2015.

Be sure to check weather and road conditions before traveling for the holidays. Current road conditions can be viewed on the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration’s website.
What You May Not Know About a MS4

Have you ever heard the term MS4 and nodded along while secretly wondering what it was? If so, don’t feel too bad. The fact is that many people do not know what a MS4 is even though they are probably surrounded by one and contribute to it every day. A MS4 is an acronym for Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System. In a nutshell it is the system of conveyances, including gutters, drains, ditches and pipes that carry storm water away from us and to the nearest waterway. While this sounds simple, it can become very complicated. That is because, along with storm water, everything else on the ground can be carried to waterways too. Things like trash, leaves, dirt, chemicals, oil, and even animal poop all impact the receiving waters in a negative way.

A MS4 can have a serious impact on waterways, and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) issues permits to entities and municipalities in order to control what reaches the creeks, streams, rivers, and lakes in the state. The University of Texas at Austin has what is known as a Phase I MS4 permit. This means we are similar to cities like Austin, Dallas and Houston in that we have the same or similar constraints and requirements to maintain water quality in our runoff. The University, through Environmental Health and Safety, has a Storm Water Management Plan (SWMP) that outlines steps to help control pollutants in stormwater, as well as to help reduce volume and flow of the stormwater runoff.

Even though EHS manages the permit and program, implementing the SWMP is a campus wide, collaborative effort that includes nearly every department on campus. When you see landscaping collecting leaves for composting, facilities collecting trash and recyclables or UEM repairing a pipe, they are all contributing to the improvement of our stormwater quality.

By this point you should be falling all over yourself wondering how you can help. The good news is it is super easy to do your part. First, Do Not Litter! Not only is littering not cool, but it contributes trash to the waterways. Second, never dump anything into a storm drain. Anything that ends up in a storm drain ends up in the waterways. This includes pet waste. Remember, if you DUMP it, you DRINK it. EHS is ready to respond to spills and dumping 24/7 so if you see something, like illegal dumping in a storm drain or an oil spill, call our hotline at 512-471-3511. Finally sign up for the Waller Creek cleanup held every spring and fall where we work to remove trash from around the creek (and get a free breakfast taco). We hope this clears up the mystery surrounding the MS4 and we will see you at the next cleanup.

To report illegal dumping, call EHS!
State Regulatory Response to Laser Eye Injury

As reported in the last newsletter, a laser eye injury occurred this past spring at the university. As required, the injury was reported by telephone and in writing to the Texas Department of State Health Services (TDSHS) who initiated an incident investigation.

The agency requested information regarding lab operations where the incident occurred:

- **List of ALL** safety training taken by **ALL** laboratory personnel, including dates of training, training topics discussed, and documentation of attendance and training materials. This included site specific training given by the PI/Lab managers.
- **Instructions to workers for laser use in the lab**, i.e. standard operating procedures (SOPs) in use at the time of the accident.
- **Details of eyewear worn in the laboratory.**
- **Photographs of the lab and optical layout where the incident occurred.**
- Review of updated SOP (with signatures of laboratory personnel).

Subsequent to the submittal of the above information, two TDSHS investigators held an on-campus interview with the Laser Safety Officer, Laser Safety Manager, the injured individual, and the lab’s research scientist. The following are several of the investigators’ questions:

- What changes have occurred in the lab since the incident, such as SOPs, training, controls, safety culture, etc.?
- What was the root cause of the injury?
- Did a single point of failure allow the injury, and does the current system have a single point of failure which could result in an injury?

The above questions required specific, detailed, articulate answers, which were provided to the investigators. The agency issued the university a Notice of Violation (Severity Level III). Given our responses and corrective actions, no further action was required, and the agency’s incident file was closed. The Notice of Violation will be posted at the laboratory and EHS for a period of one year.

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**Mechanical Engineering starts Safety Committee**

Kudos to Mechanical Engineering for starting a safety committee! Their committee has been active, identifying hazards and making their building safer. Here is a list of the departments with safety committees:

- Aerospace Engineering and Engineering Mechanics
- Chemical Engineering
- Chemistry
- McDonald Observatory (Astronomy)
- Mechanical Engineering
- Petroleum and Geosystems Engineering

If your department does not have a safety committee, EHS can help you start one! Contact EHS.
EHS Attends the Department of Energy Laser Safety Officer Workshop

During the week of September 26, 2016, EHS’s DeWayne Holcomb and Scott Pennington attended the 11th Department of Energy Laser Safety Officer Workshop held at Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, located just outside Batavia, Illinois. Fermilab specializes in high-energy particle physics. The workshop is attended by personnel from DOE laboratories, NASA, US Air Force, UK’s AWE, as well as many university and research institutions. The majority of attendees have laser safety responsibilities in a research or academic setting and want to update and expand their knowledge. The workshop featured presentations on current laser applications, associated laser safety issues and solutions. DeWayne Holcomb gave a presentation titled, “Laser Safety Aspects for Multi-Wavelength Laser Labs.”

Snake Awareness and Handling

EHS worked with Tim Cole of Austin Reptile Service to educate EHS and McDonald Observatory staff. EHS has two trainings in development to help both the UT community and snakes to coexist peacefully. Snake Awareness training helps people identify snakes and learn how to remain safe when working in areas where they may be present. Snake Handling teaches the select staff that are required to safely remove snakes from UT buildings.

REMEMBER: When relocating snakes it is very important to take the snake less than a mile away. Taking the snake further away will likely result in the snake’s death as it is not familiar with the food or water sources.

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