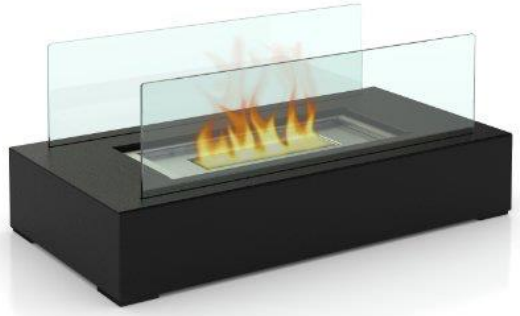
Biofuel heater burns – an update

Dr Alicia Heald, Professor Michael Muller - *Royal Brisbane And Women's Hospital*



Last year we reported a case series of 5 adults who were severely burned when using biofuel heaters. All were refilling the heater at the time of injury (or were bystanders), and sustained an average 24.7% TBSA burn. Average length of stay (LOS) was 41.8 days, 3/5 patients were admitted to ICU, and estimated cost of admission was in excess of $200,000. At the time of publication in March 2016, the heaters were still widely available and were unregulated.

Recently, we undertook a literature review to see if similar events have been reported by other institutions. Two publications from Germany have reported on burn accidents secondary to these appliances, with a total of 14 patients injured. 9/14 were refilling the appliance when it ignited, and all patients declared that they had read the safety instructions prior to use. Average burn TBSA was 19%, 53% of patients required operative debridement, and median LOS was 20 days.

In Australia, 113 injuries have been reported since 2010, and this rate has increased recently. The Office of Fair Trading released a safety warning and commenced investigations in 2014, and in 2015, Product Safety Australia released a document for retailers, detailing the dangers of these products, and mandating the reporting of any injury related to biofuel heater use. In March 2017, the Commonwealth Government enacted a national interim ban on the sale and use of these products, and product safety agencies continue to advocate for the permanent ban of these appliances.