

# Human factors researcher pushes for safer gas fireplaces

June 20 2012

---

Human factors/ergonomics researcher Carol Pollack-Nelson describes how she called on the US Consumer Product Safety Commission to require manufacturers to make glass-fronted gas fireplaces safer.

With the increase in [popularity](#) of glass-fronted or "direct vent" gas fireplaces has come an alarming increase in the number of small children who have been seriously burned by touching the hot [glass](#). Until very recently, U.S. law allowed the glass to reach the scorching temperature of 500 degrees [Fahrenheit](#) (260° C). [Human factors/ergonomics](#) researcher Carol Pollack-Nelson, in her upcoming *Ergonomics in Design* article, "The Burn Hazard Presented by Gas Fireplace Glass," describes how she called on the U.S. [Consumer Product Safety Commission](#) (CPSC) to require manufacturers to make glass-fronted gas fireplaces safer.

In the article, Pollack-Nelson documents a number of factors that, in combination, have likely contributed to an estimated 1,754 burns among small children between 1999 and 2009: (a) They are attracted by fire; (b) direct vent fireplaces are in easy reach of toddlers, who are unsteady on their feet; (c) few units come with a barrier to prevent touching the glass; and (d) consumers have not been sufficiently warned that the glass can reach such high heat or that it retains heat long after the unit has been turned off.

"The glass front of a gas fireplace may seem like a barrier to parents but in fact the glass is hot enough to cause severe burns with only

momentary contact," said Pollack-Nelson. "With a log fireplace, there is no glass front, so parents may be more vigilant when a fire is going."

A number of voluntary standards address the burn risk, but manufacturers of gas fireplaces have never been required to incorporate safety features into their designs to protect children and other consumers from the excessively hot glass fronts. Although a few safety-conscious manufacturers already include an integrated mesh screen that prevents access to the glass, most do not.

Pollack-Nelson reached out to the industry's voluntary standards organization and requested that action be taken to revise the standard to require protection against the hazard. When no action was taken one year later, she petitioned the CPSC for a mandatory rule. After the Commission docketed the petition, industry began to take action. As of January 2012, the industry began to revise the voluntary standard, laying out a plan that requires a physical barrier for all gas fireplaces that are installed less than 4 feet above the floor, as well as plans to undertake a consumer awareness campaign.

Provided by Human Factors and Ergonomics Society

Citation: Human factors researcher pushes for safer gas fireplaces (2012, June 20) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-06-human-factors-safer-gas-fireplaces.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.