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Cold Burns

Introduction

Cold burns can occur from skin contact with very cold objects or when unprotected skin is exposed to liquid propane. In this case the liquid then evaporates withdrawing a large amount of heat from this area causing tissue damage.

The severe cold can de-sensitise the affected area and the casualty may not feel any pain at the time.

Has a person suffered a Cold Burn?

Cold burns are not always immediately obvious; they can take some time to become evident, by then treatment is more difficult and not so effective.

Adopt the "precautionary principle." If a person reports that LPG has come into contact with them or their clothes you must assume that they have suffered a cold burn, even if they do not report discomfort at the time.

If they report a "tingling" feeling they may have received a severe burn.

First Aid

What to do: In severe cases (obvious injury, freezing of the skin or clothing, red "patch" larger than a thumb nail or reported "tingling"), medical help must be sought immediately (call 999).

Due to the potential for shock to set in the casualty must not drive anywhere before receiving medical treatment.

The medical services procedures for cold burn should be as for hot burns.

In all cases:

- Immerse in or flush affected area with TEPID water (not hot), for at least 10 minutes. (Delays in this treatment can result in more damage to the affected area of tissue so the more prompt the action the better the chance of success.)
- Loosen any clothing that may restrict blood flow.
- Thaw out any frozen clothing with tepid water but DO NOT remove.
- Keep contaminated clothing away from ignition sources as some gas may be given off during thawing.
- Loosely cover the affected area with a clean, dry dressing.

- Do not allow smoking or drinking of alcohol; these reduce the blood flow to any affected area.
- If medical help has not been summoned, recommend the person contacts their GP or hospital A & E department for a check up as soon as possible.

Do not alarm the person; stress that medical attention is a wise precaution and that all injuries or potential injuries are treated in the same way.

Reporting

Like any other incident cold burns or potential cold burns must be reported and investigated in accordance with company Health and Safety procedures.

References

Emergency Action for Burns: HSE Books ISBN 0 7176 1444 1

Liquid Gas UK

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