



Department of Public Safety
Larry L. Noble, Commissioner
215 East 7th Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50319
Telephone Number: (515) 725-6182
Facsimile Number: (515) 725-6195



Raymond A. Reynolds, Fire Marshal

For immediate release
Tuesday, August 30, 2011
Des Moines, Iowa

Jessica Lown
Public Information Bureau
(515) 725-6196

STATE FIRE MARSHAL DIVISION WARNS OF DANGERS USING DECORATIVE “GEL FIRE POT”

Des Moines, IOWA --- The Iowa Department of Public Safety-State Fire Marshal Division urges citizens to use caution when lighting or burning decorative, gel-fueled fire pots. Several people have been admitted to the University of Iowa Burn Unit with serious burns as a result of using decorative, gel fire pots. Nationally, there have been over 37 reported accidents, with 23 of them injuring consumers.

Decorative fire pots can be purchased at many local retail stores. The fire pots use a “gel-like” fuel inside a metal container which is housed in a decorative ceramic piece. Witnesses to local fire incidents likened the fuel gel to napalm, saying it exploded into a fire ball and stuck to clothing making it very difficult to extinguish, even when rolling on the ground.

State Fire Marshal Special Agent in Charge Ron Humphrey says, “In most cases the danger arises when people are re-filling the fire pots with the fuel gel as the flame gets low and appears to be completely out. Often times the flame is barely visible but still lit. The fire pots burst into flames, spraying the gel fuel on anyone nearby.”

In the latest incident this last weekend in Des Moines, the fire pot had been burning for about 90 minutes when the container simply exploded, launching burning fuel onto a person’s lap. That person was eventually admitted to the University of Iowa Burn Unit with serious burns. Another couple near Moline, Illinois had just purchased their fire pot Sunday and were refilling it after the flames looked to be extinguished. The metal can filled with gel fuel shot out of the ceramic vase and sprayed burning fuel on the couple. Both suffered burns and one person was admitted to the University of Iowa Burn Unit.

Dr. Lucy Wibbenmeyer, Clinical Associate Professor of Surgery at the University Hospital and Clinics says, “Burn injuries have been inflicted even by units purchased at high-end department stores as well as big retail stores. People might think the



Department of Public Safety
Larry L. Noble, Commissioner
215 East 7th Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50319
Telephone Number: (515) 725-6182
Facsimile Number: (515) 725-6195



Raymond A. Reynolds, Fire Marshal

more expensive units are inherently safer, but cost is not a determining factor in the injuries we are seeing.”

Several retailers have voluntarily removed the products from store shelves, and some fire pots have been recalled due to fire risks. Manufacturers have several safety tips for operating decorative fire pots:

- 1) Do not overfill the devices. If you accidentally overfill the device, wash the ceramic vessel with soap and water before inserting the fuel.
- 2) Do not reach over the fire pot.
- 3) Never leave the device unattended and never let children play near the fire pots.
- 4) Keep a portable fire extinguisher or water supply near the fire pot.
- 5) Never add fuel to an open flame and assure the ceramic vessel has cooled sufficiently before adding fuel.

The State Fire Marshal Division would recommend using something other than fire and combustible liquids to relax on your deck this summer. If you must use fire pots, keep a safe distance from open flames. In some cases the flaming gel has sprayed three to four feet from the fire pot. The Iowa Department of Public Safety reminds you to play it safe as you enjoy your summer and fall outside.

###