

Coffee Stand Owner Dies When Leak from Propane Cylinder Causes a Fire



SUMMARY

In January of 2016, a 26-year-old drive-through coffee stand owner died from burns she received when her stand caught fire. Propane vapor leaking from a 20-pound barbecue style cylinder was ignited by the open flame of a propane space heater's pilot light. The space heater was used to heat the stand. She had been using the 20-pound cylinder with a coupler adapter to transfer propane to refill 1-pound cylinders. These cylinders were used to fuel the space heater. She received burns to 90% of her body and died four days later.

On the way to the hospital she told a paramedic that her propane space heater and a propane cylinder had blown up and caused the whole stand to instantly fill with flames. She further related that she could not exit by the door because the deadbolt lock required a key to unlock and she was unable to reach the key which was located in another part of the stand near the fire. Eventually, she managed to open the stand's sliding service window and jump out.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To prevent similar occurrences in the future, Washington State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) investigators concluded that employers and business owners should follow these guidelines:

- **Employers and business owners should recognize and train employees on the potential fire, explosion, and burn hazards associated with propane gas vapor in the vicinity of an open flame, such as the pilot light of a propane-powered space heater.**
- **Employers and business owners should not use adapters to transfer propane from larger cylinders to refill one-time use only 1-pound propane cylinders, as this practice creates a risk of fire, explosion, serious injury, or death.**
- **Employers and business owners should follow National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) building fire codes and local building codes to ensure safe building egress (exit).**
- **Employers and business owners should provide adequate heat in a safe manner to the workplace.**

The full version of this investigation report, along with the detailed recommendations and discussions section, can be found at: www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Research/FACE/Files/CoffeeBaristaFire.pdf

Or go to www.lni.wa.gov/SHARP. Choose the **Publications** tab on the left side of the page and enter **52-37-2016** into the search box.

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The Washington State Fatality Assessment and Control (WA FACE) program is one of many workplace health and safety programs administered by the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries' Safety & Health & Research for Prevention (SHARP) program. It is a research program designed to identify and study fatal occupational injuries. Under a cooperative agreement with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH grant # 2U600H008487-11), WA FACE collects information on occupational fatalities in WA State and targets specific types of fatalities for evaluation. More information about WA FACE can be found at www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Research/FACE.