Position Statement on the danger of tap water scalds
December 2010

Scald due to overly hot tap water are a cause of severe injury in very young children and a source of tremendous pain, requiring multiple hospitalisations and lengthy treatment resulting in permanent disability or disfigurement and even death.¹ Hot bath water is one of the most common causes of serious scald injuries among young children.² Every year in the United Kingdom for example, approximately 500 children under the age of five are hospitalised due to a severe scald caused by bath water, over 20 of whom die of their injuries and a further 2,000 children are seen in the emergency department for bath water scalds.³

Scalds are also expensive to treat due to their severity and can cost as much as 290,000 € per severe injury.³ Research suggests an inequality in tap water scald rates, with children of lower socioeconomic backgrounds having higher risk of severe scald injuries at home and higher rates of scald related hospitalisation than children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.³

Tap water scalds are preventable through modifications in the home environment. Possible modifications include installing boiler management systems in residential buildings, reducing the temperature setting of gas and oil water heaters in single-family units, installing a master thermostatic mixing valve at the water heater and / or installing thermostatic mixing valves on individual bath taps.

A thermostatic mixing valve is a temperature-limiting device which can be fitted to a water heater, spout or bath tap to mix in cooler water as needed at the point of output, while allowing water to be stored at a higher temperature.⁴ To date lowering the water exit point temperature has not been shown to increase the risk of Legionnaires’ disease, a form of pneumonia, however lower water temperature legislation has been shown to effectively reduce the number of scald injuries.⁵ – ⁷ Reducing the temperature of tap water also provides the further benefit of reducing energy costs and greenhouse emissions.⁸

Currently there are no European-wide regulations concerning the maximum temperature of domestic hot water at the point of delivery to the consumer, e.g. from the tap in the bath.⁹

As hot tap water scalds pose a major threat to the safety of children in Europe the European Child Safety Alliance recommends the following actions:

- That the European Commission initiates legislation which requires all homes, including owners of rental dwellings to have a controlled bathroom water temperature so that the water exiting the taps does not exceed 50°C.

- That Member States adopt, implement and enforce legislation that requires water exiting bathroom taps to not exceed 50°C in order to reduce the risk of severe scalds.

- That the European Commission supports a European-wide campaign to coincide with the introduction of EU and national policies to control maximum water temperatures in bathroom taps to reduce scalds.
By limiting the maximum temperature of domestic hot water taps to 50°C in the European Community, severe hot water burns and permanent disability to children will be reduced.

This position statement is supported by the following European Child Safety Alliance country partner organisations:

- Grosse schuetzen Kleine Austria
- Kuratorium fuer Verkehrsicherheit Austria
- Kind en Gezin Belgium
- O/VO-CRIOC Belgium
- Center for Injury Prevention, Charles University Czech Republic
- National Institute of Child Health Hungary
- Icelandic Safety House Iceland
- Population Health: Children and Young People’s Team Ireland
- National Center for Children’s Safety and Health Israel
- Ministry of Health Latvia
- Ministry of Health Luxembourg
- Institute of Public Health Republic of Macedonia
- The Consumer Safety Institute The Netherlands
- Norwegian Safety Forum Norway
- Institute of Public Health, Jagiellonian University Poland
- Portuguese Association for Child Safety & Injury Control Portugal
- Institute of Public Health Slovenia
- Ministry of Health Spain
- Spanish Paediatric Surgeon Society Spain
- The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) Sweden
- The Child Safety Council Sweden
- Swiss Council for Accident Prevention Switzerland
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents United Kingdom
- Child Accident Prevention Trust United Kingdom
- Children in Wales Wales
- Wales Collaboration for Accident Prevention and Injury Control Wales

The following European organisations also agree and support this position:

- European Burns Association (EBA)
- European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
- Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)
- International Society for Child and Adolescent Injury Prevention (ISCAIP)
References


2. RoSPA Press Office: Press Release; November 6, 2006; Action Needed To Cut Burns and Scalds Among Children


