

# WELLNESS CONNECTION

LIVE WELL. WORK WELL.

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## EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT - Interview with Chief John High



*By Seth Yoder*

**Q. Chief High, could you please tell me what your job title is and describe what you do in your role?**

**A.** I am the Program Manager for the Fire Prevention and Investigation Programs at the Fire Service Institute. In my role, I coordinate classes on fire prevention and investigation programs for firefighters throughout the state of Illinois. I also collect and curate all the materials for the classes to ensure they are accurate and up to date with code changes.

**Q. The first full week of February is Burn Awareness week. With that in mind, could you share where most burns occur and their primary causes?**

**A.** One of the most common burns firefighters come across are burns that occur in the kitchen. This is where we spend the majority of our time talking about burn prevention. Our discussions largely focus on keeping combustible materials, like paper towels and cookbooks, away from open flames.

We also spend a great deal of time discussing how to prevent or respond to grease fires. Grease fires often occur because we are doing too many things in the kitchen and forget about the pan heating on the stove. The most dangerous part of grease fires is how we react to them. Our natural inclination is to put water on a fire, but in the case of a grease fire, water will only make the situation worse. We encourage people if they can, to turn down the heat and slide the pan away. If that option is not possible, the next best option is to cover the flames with a lid or a large cookie sheet which will allow you to keep some distance away from the flames. If the fire has spread beyond both of these options, the last option would be to use an ABC fire extinguisher, which is an easy dry chemical-type of fire extinguisher.

**Q. There are many different types of burns. What advice would you give on treating different types of burns?**

**A.** Yes, there are a variety of types of burns. For example, burns caused by fire are referred to as thermal burns. There are also burns caused by chemicals, called chemical burns and there are also electrical burns. Regardless of the type of burn the first thing you should always do after experiencing a burn (if possible) is to move away from whatever has caused the burn and immediately start to cool the burn area. You can do this by running cool water over the burn area. The water should be cool and not ice cold, because you want to gradually cool down the burn area. If you get a chemical burn, you should wash the chemicals off immediately and continue to rinse the burn area for at least 15 minutes to ensure you have washed all the chemicals off your skin. If you get an electrical burn, depending on the severity of the shock, you should seek medical treatment because there could be internal burns that you would otherwise be unaware of.

For first and second-degree burns on the skin, you can often treat them at home with ointment and bandages. However, it is important that you do your best to not bust any blisters, as the blister protects the skin from infection. If you experience a third-degree burn, which is a burn that burns down into your lower tissue, or a burn around your mouth and/or nose, you should seek medical treatment.

**Q. Are there any unlikely burn hazards that we should be aware of?**

**A.** Probably the most disguised type of burn is the electrical burn simply because we rarely see any type of burn on the skin as a result of this type of burn. However, like I mentioned previously, there might be an entrance and exit wound caused by an electrical burn, but the majority of the damage will be internal. For example, if you get an electrical shock entering your right arm, the shock is going to find the quickest path to the ground and that path may directly collide with your heart, which has the potential to cause serious damage you may not recognize

immediately. I would encourage anyone who has experienced an electrical burn to seek medical treatment if they are unsure of the severity of the burn.

**Q. There are a variety of burn hazards around the house and outdoors. Could you please describe the most common indoor and outdoor hazards we should be aware of?**

**A.** Kitchen related burns are the most common in the house. In addition to burns around the kitchen, another hazard in the house - particularly this time of year - are space heaters. The important thing to remember with space heaters is to plug them into the wall and not an extension cord. The longer the cord, the greater the resistance and resistance causes the heater to overheat which can lead to a fire. Another potential hazard can be candles. During the holidays and winter months people often light candles around the house. It's important to remember to keep candles in a proper holder and keep them away from any type of combustible materials or drapes.

Turning to the outdoors, the most common burn area is around the barbeque. Regardless of the type of barbeque you are using, it will be important to keep people a safe distance away while cooking. If you are using a propane barbeque, you should always check to make sure there are no leaks and if it doesn't light right away turn off the grill and wait until some of the propane has ventilated. Propane is heavier than oxygen and will collect at the bottom of the grill which can cause a large flame once the grill ignites.

Other fire and burn risks outside can be equipment like snowblowers and lawn mowers. If you need to refuel this type of equipment, be sure to give them some time to cool down before refueling. The hot equipment can potentially catch fire while refueling. Lastly, be careful with overloaded electrical circuits. During the holidays, we might plug in all the lights into one outlet and this can lead to a potential fire and burns.

For further burn awareness resources please visit this link on the [System HR Wellness Webpage](#).

