HPBA JOURNAL

Volume 19, Number 2 A Publication Of The Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association

Gas Fireplace Glass Fronts – What to tell your Customers about Fireplace, Stove and Insert Glass Safety

By Leslie Wheeler

Most people in the fireplace and stove industry know not to touch the glass front of fireplaces, stoves and inserts when they're turned on, or recently turned off.

However, many homeowners are not aware of this potential danger, and HPBA has embarked on a campaign to inform them of safety measures they can take to avoid family members, especially children, from touching the glass.

In 2007, a pediatrician in British Columbia was concerned about the increasing number of burns on children from glass-fronted fireplaces. HPBA and HPBA Canada developed a safety information brochure, *Fireplace and Stove Glass Safety*, and created a new glass warning symbol for manufacturers and retailers to use on their promotional material.

Unfortunately, this campaign did not have the reach HPBA had hoped, and in 2010 the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) received two petitions requesting the agency to make barriers for glass-fronted gas products mandatory. The CPSC published a request for comments on the petitions and HPBA responded.

HPBA's response to the agency included two primary arguments. First, HPBA pointed out that CPSC was required to rely on voluntary standards, not regulations, whenever possible. The comments described the expedited progress the CSA Working Group was making on changes to its Z21.50 and Z21.88 standards to address this safety issue. And, secondly, HPBA reported to CPSC that it was ramping up its education program to remind the public of the possible burn hazard.

In July 2012, CSA approved, and ANSI formally passed in December, the standards that require all fireplaces, stoves and inserts with glass fronts that exceed 172 degrees F to have protective barriers by January 1, 2015. The certified barrier must be supplied with the product and must be attached by the installer. Product that is manufactured prior to that date, and does not meet the standard, may still be sold after January 1, 2015. Manufacturers of unvented glass-fronted gas fireplaces, stoves and inserts should also be aware that CSA will be revising the standard for those products where the glass exceeds 172 degrees F.

As a result of HPBA's efforts on the education campaign and the industry's aggressive work on the new standards, CPSC delayed action on the petitions for six months. HPBA submitted a letter to the Chairman respectfully asking her to deny the petitions, but the agency responded in September 2012 that it will continue to defer action until spring 2013 to ensure that all changes on the standards complete the approval process.

As the standards revisions were in development, HPBA kicked off an education campaign to reach current owners of glass-front fireplaces, stoves and inserts to remind them of the possible burn hazard and to give them options of what they can do to protect themselves. This is a critical component of the industry's case against CPSC regulation, and HPBA has stressed the importance to its members to reach out to their customers with safety reminders.

The multi-year campaign, a CPSC requirement, has already reached top media outlets. In October, *USA Today* ran an article about the dangers of burns from the glass and included a story and photos of a burned toddler, but also added a report about the work the hearth industry has done to make fireplaces safer. In November, Minneapolis/St. Paul television station KSTP interviewed HPBA Chairman Rodger Holland and fireplace screen manufacturer Reed Gnos from Quanex on fireplace protection to avoid burns. And, in December, the NBC affiliate in Washington, D.C., did a similar story about a burned child and also interviewed HPBA's spokesperson Leslie Wheeler on the barrier options available to consumers that have a glass-front fireplace. The story was subsequently picked up by a number of affiliates in other cities.

The images of burned toddlers are disturbing – no one

continued on pg. 82

("Gas Fireplace…" continued from page 81)

wants to see a child's pain – so it is important for manufacturers and retailers to reach out to their customers to inform them of the aftermarket barrier and screens available to them. HPBA developed three promotional pieces, a brochure, a safety check list (see sidebar) and a FAQ list, as well as a website, www.safefireplacetips.com, for retailers and manufacturers to download and send to their customers. Retailers are urged to check with their manufacturers for acceptable attachable screens, to carry free-standing screens and hearth gates for their past and current customers. This is an opportunity for retailers to make an add-on sale, and it's a way for manufacturers to limit their liability. HPBA is also reaching out to child safety advocates, doctor and nurse organizations, "mommy blogs" and the hospitality industry with its safety message.

The gas fireplace industry is not out of the woods yet with regard to regulation by the CPSC. HPBA and its member manufacturers and retailers must continue to stress to the public the importance of protection and the available options for homeowners. This can be accomplished through advertising, on showroom floors and in promotional material. Do it now and help make our products safer.

Safety Checklist for Homeowners

- **Increase Awareness –** Make sure family members and guests are aware that the glass panel of a gas fireplace, stove or insert can be very hot.
- **Cool Down –** Wait for the appliance and glass panel to cool down before allowing anyone to get near it. Cool down can take a long time – an hour or more. Since some appliances use a thermostat to automatically turn the fire on/off, you may not know when the fire was actually turned off.
- **Exercise Caution –** Always consider the glass as potentially hot.
- **Read Owner's Manual –** Always read the owner's manual for safe use.

Checklist for Households with Children

- **Never Leave Unattended –** Always supervise children, the aged, infirm or pets near an operating gas fireplace, stove or insert – or one that has recently been turned off.
- **Explain –** Explain fireplace safety with children and at-risk individuals, and make sure they know they should never touch the glass panel.
- **Secure Remote Control –** Keep the remote control (if your appliance has one) out of the reach of children. It may be possible to shut off your remote when not in use. Consult your manual.
- **Install Switch Lock –** Install a switch lock to prevent children from turning on the gas fireplace, stove or insert. Operation of these switches differs by manufacturer, so be sure to read the instructions carefully.

Available Safety Products

- **Install a Protective Screen or Barrier –** Consumers with existing fireplaces, stoves or inserts should consider installing a protective screen or physical barrier to protect contact with hot glass, especially if there are children or other at-risk individuals in the house. Safety products come in various forms, including:

  Attachable safety screens (fastens to the front of the fireplace, stove or insert).*

  Free-standing safety gates (barriers set up to prevent access).

  Free-standing fireplace screens (constructed of mesh screen and set back from the fireplace or stove front).

- **Get Informed –** Proper fit of your protective screen or barrier is important, so ask an expert. Visit SafeFireplaceTips.com, contact your fireplace, stove or insert manufacturer, or visit a hearth products specialty retailer for advice on safety products that meet your needs. To locate a retailer, please visit http://www.hpba.org/retailer-locator.

*Note: Aftermarket safety screens that attach to the fireplace, stove or insert could adversely affect the safe operation of your unit. Contact the safety screen manufacturer to verify that the safety screen is approved by the fireplace manufacturer for your appliance.

Editor's Note: A print-ready file of this checklist and an information brochure and FAQ list can be downloaded at www.safefireplacetips.com.

The *HPBA Journal* is intended to provide in-depth information to the hearth and outdoor products industry. Statements of fact and opinion are the responsibility of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the officers, board, staff or members of the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association.

Copyright ©2013 by the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association is prohibited. Direct requests for permission to use material published in the *HPBA Journal* to the Director of Communications, HPBA, 1901 N. Moore St., Suite 600, Arlington, VA 22209, (703)522-0086 or email: hpbamail@hpba.org.