

Safety

& THE LAW

Winter 1995

A Newsletter to live by from the law firm of ROBERTS & ROBERTS

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Check this Listing of Potential Problem Products

Heat Tape Fire Hazards

With the arrival of winter weather, many home and building owners will be faced with the problem of frozen water lines. Mobile home owners and occupants of older buildings, especially, need to protect water lines from the cold. The most common method of dealing with the problem of frozen pipes is the use of electric heat tapes.

Heat tapes are basically electrical wires covered with ribbon-like strips of plastic. They are installed by wrapping them around pipes. When the tape is plugged in and turned on, it warms up and keeps the pipes from freezing. Some models have thermostats, are plugged in year-round, and only come on when the temperature approaches freezing.

Consumers should be warned, however, that heat tapes can cause fires. Every year, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, heat tapes cause over 2,600 fires which result in an estimated 20 deaths, 160 injuries, and over \$25.4 million in property damage.

If it is necessary to use a heat tape, use only those tapes that have been approved by

Underwriters' Laboratories (UL). Most heat tape fires are caused by heat tapes that do not satisfy UL's safety standards.

Any minor installation error can cause a heat tape to malfunction and result in a life-threatening fire. If you do not understand the installation instructions, do not try to install it yourself. Instead, hire a professional electrician.

Never wrap a heat tape in layers or allow it to overlap itself even the tiniest bit. That's the surest way to start a fire.

Check the tape often throughout the winter. If it shows any evidence of melting, discoloration, or charring, disconnect the tape immediately and replace it. Whenever the outside temperature rises above freezing, unplug the heat tape until it is absolutely necessary to use it again. Do not count on thermostats that are built into some heat tapes; they often do not work.



If you must use heat tapes, read this article again. It may save your life and the lives of your family.

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Crib Cornerposts May Cause Strangulation

Family Safety Update

The Consumer Product Safety Commission warns that crib cornerposts which are more than 1/16" in height create a strangulation hazard for a child.

When a child moves about in the corner areas of the crib, their clothing, necklace, or pacifier cord may catch on the crib's cornerpost and tighten around their neck. Dozens of babies have been strangled or choked because of these knobs or posts.

Most crib manufacturers have already stopped making cribs with post extensions. However, there may be thousands of such cribs still in people's homes, at garage sales, or in second-hand furniture stores.

If you already own a crib with cornerpost extensions more than 1/16" in height, the

Consumer Product Safety Commission urges you to remove the extensions and throw them away. Some may be removed merely by unscrewing, while others may have to be sawed off and sanded smooth.

If you are purchasing a new or used crib, look for one that has cornerpost extensions less than 1/16" above the top edge of the end or side. Of course, crib cornerpost extensions which are very high with the tops out of reach of a child, such as where the posts are supports for a canopy, may not present a hazard.

Other tips for avoiding strangulation hazards include:

- Never tie an object, such as a pacifier, around a child's neck.
- Never hang any stringed object such as a toy or laundry bag on the cornerpost. If you have toys with cords, cut them off.
- Avoid placing the crib next to a window where a child could strangle on a drapery or blind cord.



Law Update

Q. Is my employer responsible for providing me with safety equipment for doing my job?

A. Yes. By law, your employer must furnish you with all the safety equipment you need to work in a reasonably safe manner. This includes paying for any protective clothing and personal protective equipment reasonably necessary to protect your eyes, face, head, feet, and hands.

If you choose to provide your own protective equipment, your employer must ensure that this equipment is adequate and properly maintained.

Gas-Fueled Tools Can Poison Users

Last year, two laborers cleaning an empty underground parking garage collapsed and had to be treated in a hospital emergency room for carbon monoxide poisoning. Two other workers and a foreman were also treated. They had been using a gas-fueled power washer.

Workers can suffer carbon monoxide poisoning if they use gas-fueled equipment where there isn't enough fresh air. Even open doors and fans may not provide enough ventilation. Studies have found that workers were poisoned by carbon monoxide while using propane-powered forklifts in a warehouse, gasoline-powered saws, gas-fueled power washers, and liquid-propane-powered floor burnishers.

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, tasteless, and colorless gas. It quickly enters the lungs and attaches to the blood, which moves it quickly throughout the body. The level of poisoning is affected by the concentration of carbon monoxide in the air, the length of the exposure, the exercise involved in the work being done (which affects the breathing rate), and personal factors. In some cases, a victim may not show dizziness or other symptoms.

People exposed to carbon monoxide may initially suffer flu-like symptoms including nausea, fatigue, headaches, dizziness, confusion and breathing difficulty. Because carbon monoxide poisoning often causes a victim's blood pressure to rise, the victim's skin may take on a pink or red cast.

Unconsciousness or death can result in minutes with high levels of exposure to

carbon monoxide. Those who survive may still suffer breathing difficulty, brain damage, or permanent injury to the nervous system.

Employers can cut the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning by using electric equipment, good ventilation, monitoring, and training. When gas-fueled equipment is necessary, it should be fitted with a catalytic converter and well-maintained, to give off less carbon monoxide.

Even with these steps, the amount of carbon monoxide may still be too high to use gas-fueled equipment in some areas. Air monitoring is needed to make sure workers are not exposed to unsafe levels of the gas. This monitoring requires special equipment and people trained to use it.



All workers must be told about the dangers of using gas-fueled equipment in enclosed spaces.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration's hotline for emergency reporting of major workplace hazards is 1-800-321-OSHA.

Workplace Safety Update

ROBERTS & ROBERTS

Roberts & Roberts is an East Texas law firm with a history of helping people injured by unsafe practices and products. Randell C. Roberts and Bruce L. Roberts are board certified in Personal Injury Trial Law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization. They are also members of the:

- Institute for Product Safety
- National Safe Workplace Institute
- National Safety Council
- Texas Safety Association
- National Head Injury Foundation
- National Spinal Cord Injury Association

If you know of someone who is injured, Roberts & Roberts wants to help.





Consumer Product Warnings & Recalls

You may obtain more information about product recalls by calling the Consumer Product Safety Commission at 1-800-638-2772, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration at 1-800-424-9393, or the Food and Drug Administration at 1-800-332-1088.

Approximately 466,000 GM Geo cars and sport utility vehicles are recalled because the front seat belt buckle release buttons may degrade and fail. The vehicles include the GM 1989-91 Geo Metro passenger cars, 1990-91 Geo Storm cars, and the 1989-91 Geo Tracker Sport utility vehicles.

Makita U.S.A., Inc. is recalling 130,000 five inch random orbit finishing sanders (Model B05000). The metal fan inside the sander can fracture causing pieces of the broken fan to break through the motor cover possibly injuring the operator.

Game Tracker is recalling 92,000 Deluxe Safety-Belt & Climbing Harness products and Lifeline Safety Harness products after receiving 5 reports of the equipment failing and resulting in falls or serious injuries. The climbing harnesses were sold as restraints to prevent hunters from falling when hunting from trees or tree stands.

Some 6,500 GM mini-vans are recalled because the brake pedal assemblies can fracture resulting in a loss of braking. The GM models are the 1995 Chevrolet Lumina, Pontiac Transport, and Oldsmobile Silhouette mini-vans.

Playskool is recalling 123,000 children's swings because infants can fall out of the swings. Consumers should return the Playskool 1-2-3 Swing to the store immediately for a full refund.

Approximately 87,000 1994-95 Buick Roadmasters, Cadillac Fleetwoods, and Chevrolet Caprices are recalled. The engine might not return to idle speed when the accelerator is released at low temperatures.