

Keep your bathroom safe

There are products available that can help prevent scalding

By LAVERNE STEWART
stewart.laverne@dailygleaner.com
Published Saturday January 19th, 2008
Appeared on page E7

It's every family's nightmare. A loved one badly burned or killed after a scalding accident while taking a bath in a tub that's too hot.

It can easily happen. In most Canadian homes, hot-water heaters are set at 60 C (140°F). The water needs to be this hot to prevent bacterial growth in water heaters, which is the leading cause of Legionnaire's disease.

However, water at 60 C can cause third-degree burns which damages all layers of the skin. It can happen to adults in six seconds. Young children, with far more delicate skin, can suffer a serious hot-water burn in as little as one second. The elderly and those with disabilities are also more susceptible to severe scalds.

The Canadian Hospitals Injury Reporting and Prevention Program (CHIRPP) examined 830 cases of scald injuries among children who visited 15 participating hospitals. The study's findings showed scald injuries were often very serious.

Hot tap water was responsible for seven per cent of hospital visits and treatment and children under five suffered 75 per cent of those injuries. Water-burn injuries can be agonizingly painful. In worst cases, scalding can even lead to death.

This is what happened to a toddler named Leah McCammon, of Georgia, who died in March 2002 just a few days before her first birthday after a scalding accident while in the tub. She received third-degree burns over most of her body after her grandmother left her in an empty bathtub while she went to answer the phone.

In the minute she was unattended, the toddler tried to pull herself up using the hot-water faucet handle. The force of 60C (140°F) water knocked her down and severely burned most of her tiny body. She was air-lifted to Shriners Hospital for Children, which specializes in pediatric intensive burn care, but she died a few days later.

Not long after, a friend of the family decided something needed to be invented to help people avoid similar tragedies. This led to the invention of a product called hot stop.

It's an anti-scald device that can be installed by homeowners on their tub faucets and shower heads. You don't have to do any major renovation. It's just a matter of replacing your existing shower head and/or bathtub spout. When hot water reaches an unsafe temperature, hot stop quickly reduces the water flow to a trickle to avoid scalding. Once the water in the line cools, the flow restarts automatically, usually within 30 seconds.

If the water coming from your tap is too hot, you can install valves in the plumbing lines behind your tub and shower walls to reduce the temperature of the water delivered at the tap by mixing cold water to reduce the temperature. But hot stop is currently the only product on the market that has this anti-scald feature in the shower head and bath spout, explains Marcy Guterman, spokesperson for American Valve, hot stop's manufacturer.

"There are other products on the market but you have to hire a plumber to install them and it can be very costly. This is a do-it-yourself, inexpensive solution. If I can install it anyone can install it. It takes probably less than 10 minutes.

"It does allow for a warm shower or bath but it won't allow the water to get to the point where you will get burned. It makes me feel a lot safer and we're trying to spread the word about a very common danger. I think it's a great thing that we can protect ourselves with something that's very affordable

and easy to install.

"We have partnered with the Home Safety Council and Shriners Burn Hospitals to help spread the word about this product," says Guterman.

The Canadian Safety Council says while it's important to maintain your hot-water heater at a temperature of 60C to prevent bacterial growth it is also vital to protect yourself and your family against scalding accidents.

This is why council spokesperson Suzanne Robillard says the safety council urges people to use common sense safety precautions whenever using hot water

-- things like never leaving a child alone while drawing water in a bathtub, checking the water temperature before putting your child in, testing the water temperature before bathing or showering yourself, turning the cold water on first and then adding hot water until the temperature is comfortable. Be sure to teach children these safety practices too, she stresses.

Robillard says she is pleased to see new products on the market that will help prevent scalding accidents when people are bathing and showering.

"Once you follow basic precautions it's a good idea to consider using safety gadgets that may prevent scalding. The bottom line is water must be stored at a high temperature to avoid bacterial growth but it can be delivered from the tap at a lower temperature too. If there's a gadget that can help do that, sure it's a good idea."

The cost is \$24.98 for shower heads and bathtub spouts. The hand-held shower device retails for \$39.98 while the combination of the shower head and tub spout retails for \$44.98. This product is not yet available through local retailers but can be purchased online at www.shopping.yahoo.com, www.amazon.com as well as Lowes' online store at www.lowes.com.

Log in to access premium content and features on this site.



Register For a **ONE Account** - FREE!

Want online access to Atlantic Canada's premiere source for local news, entertainment, sports and much more? [Click here](#) to register online **FREE**.