

Where There's Smoke...

**By Reg P. Wydeven
August 7, 2013**

During my senior year of college, my buddies and I ventured to Panama City for Spring Break. To prepare, my buddy, Tree, and I went to a shoe store in the mall because they also had a tanning bed.

We wanted to get a good base tan so we wouldn't get burned when we got to Florida. This worked out okay, but not great: for me, I was so white to begin with, the tanning sessions brought me to almost normal; Tree got a great bronze base, but because he's 6'7" and hung over the end of the tanning bed, from the middle of his calves down he was still as white as me.

Because we pre-tanned a little bit, I did not spontaneously burst into flames when stepping off the bus in Panama City (much to everyone's surprise). Of course, I still got burned, but not as bad as I would have without tanning first.

Since that trip, I wear sunscreen religiously, and apply it to my kids all the time. We must wear SPF5000 or something, because it comes out of the tube with the consistency of peanut butter. We slap the stuff on, though, to make sure we never burst into flames.

According to recent warnings by the Food and Drug Administration, however, wearing sunscreen may actually cause us to spontaneously combust.

Just ask Brett Sigworth. Last June, Sigworth was going to be spending some time in his backyard, so he sprayed on some Banana Boat Sport Performance sunscreen. He then walked over to his lit grill and tended to the charcoal briquettes and his arm started on fire.

Sigworth ended up with second degree burns wherever he sprayed the sunscreen, including his arm, chest, ear and back. According to the FDA, Sigworth is just one of five people in the last year or so who were wearing spray-on sunscreen near open flames and caught fire, getting burned to the point where they needed medical attention.

As a result, the FDA issued a formal warning to consumers, alerting them to the dangers of applying spray-on sunscreen and getting too close to an open flame. In addition, Banana Boat recalled some of its spray-on sunscreen to prevent further injuries. The company believes their bottles had spray valves that were too big and delivered more sunscreen, causing it to take longer to dry on the skin.

While sunscreen itself is typically not flammable, when sprayed out of an aerosol can, particles remaining in the air can ignite. Also, some sunscreens add flammable ingredients, such as alcohol, so they dry more quickly. While Sigworth's sunscreen did contain a warning that it was flammable and should never be applied near an open flame, it did not caution that there was a danger to simply wearing it near a fire.

However, the FDA was quick to remind consumers of the benefits of sunscreen to protect against sunburn and skin cancer. Just don't put it on while holding a sparkler.