

MEDIA RELEASE:

10 May 2016

## **Think smart and avoid fires and burn wounds, says KZN Health MEC**

KNOWLEDGE and a little caution can help prevent serious injuries and save many lives – including those of children - that are lost each year due to fire-related adverse incidents.

This is the view of KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, as the country commemorated Burns Awareness Week, which runs from 06-12 May 2016.

According to the National Burns Association of South Africa, there are approximately 6-8000 burn injuries a year – and it is believed that the number of burn-related incidents increases during winter.

This may be attributed to several factors such as the cold, which results in people making fires for heat.

Although the Department's tertiary health facilities are equipped render medical assistance to people who have sustained burns, if such injuries could be avoided, it would enable the Department to utilise its scarce resources where they are needed most.

“Conventional wisdom tells us that a lot of fire-related incidents and burn wounds can be avoided if people take a moment to just consider the risks associated with their actions, or the settings in which they find themselves. By being proactive about preventing trouble, we can make all the difference. This is why it's important for all of us as society to create as much awareness about burns and how to avoid them as possible,” MEC Dhlomo says.

“In winter, a number of fire-related cases that our Emergency Medical Services responds to involve fires, burn wounds, smoke inhalation and accidental ingestion of liquid gel fuels. “Because some people rely on candles, lanterns and braziers to provide light and heat, there is a risk that these light and heat sources may have an open flame, which poses a fire risk if it is knocked over, or if something falls against it. Considering the likelihood of these devices being used in a confined and poorly ventilated environment, like a small room, with the doors and windows closed, the smoke produced by the flames can result in respiratory conditions,” he says.

Another common cause of fires is Illegal or unsafe electrical connections – which are strongly discouraged.

To avoid burns-related problems, the following safety points need to be considered:

- Do not leave candles or cooking pots unattended while they are being used on a stove;
- Never allow children to play near fires, burning pots or kettles;
- Do not leave candles or cookers near curtain or on an uneven surface;

- Do not go to sleep with candles, fires or braziers used for heat still burning;
- Do not lock people inside a house;
- Always ensure adequate ventilation when using braziers or generators and preferably don't use them inside;
- Teach children about fire and its dangers, and keep matches away from them;
- Always store stove fuels and flammable fluids safely away.

If there is a fire, immediate action needs to be taken, such as:

- Raising the alarm/ wake up others in the house , this may also mean neighbours, depending on the living arrangements.
- Evacuating the building, crawl if necessary
- If clothes are on fire, lie on the floor and roll over
- Only put water on burn wounds
- Remove burnt clothing and jewellery from the burnt areas of the body

ENDS

Issued by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health