Halogen lamp burn to the penis

Walter Peters PhD MD FRCSC

Division of Plastic Surgery, Wellesley Central Division of St Michael's Hospital and the University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario

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A 46-year-old man presented with a unique partial thickness burn to the tip of his penis that resulted from contact with a 150-watt halogen reading lamp. The mechanism and prevention of halogen lamp burns are discussed, and the hazardous nature of halogen lamps is presented.

Key Words: *Burn; Halogen lamp; Penis*

Brûlure au pénis infligée par une lampe halogène

RÉSUMÉ : Un homme de 46 ans s'est présenté avec une brûlure au deuxième degré localisée à l'extrémité du pénis, résultat d'un contact avec une lampe halogène de lecture de 150 watt. On aborde ici le mécanisme et la prévention des brûlures par lampe halogène, de même que les risques que pose ce genre de lampes.

Isolated burn injuries to the penis are rare (1). More commonly, penile burns occur as part of burns to the general perineal region (2,3). The present report describes a unique injury in a man who sustained a contact burn to the penis from a halogen reading lamp.

CASE PRESENTATION

A 46-year-old man was sitting in his reading chair in the nude, reading a magazine, while using an adjustable 150-watt halogen swivel floor lamp. There was a glass shield over the halogen bulb. When he arose from the chair, his partially erect penis accidentally contacted the glass covering on the halogen bulb. He experienced a "sudden searing pain" at the tip of his penis. He ran quickly to the shower and applied cool water to the area. He presented to the emergency department of the local hospital. He was instructed to wash the area daily with soap and water, and to apply a layer of polytopic ointment several times daily.

The patient presented to the plastic surgery clinic two days after the injury with a 1.2 cm area of a partial thickness burn to the tip of the penis (Figure 1). He experienced only minimal discomfort in the area. There was no evidence of infection. He was instructed to continue with his treatment

regimen of daily soap and water washes and polytopic ointment applications. Two weeks later, the burn wound was completely healed. He had no further problems with this area.

DISCUSSION

Halogen bulbs operate at temperatures that are much higher than other types of light bulbs (4,5). A 75-watt halogen bulb operates at about 260°F (5). Bulbs for halogen torchiere floor lamps operate at even higher temperatures (4). Halogen torchiere floor lamps use either a 300- or 500-watt bulb. Within 1 min, a 300-watt bulb can reach 940°F, and a 500-watt bulb can reach 1200°F. In addition, these lamps are often manufactured without a guard covering the bulb (4). They can, therefore, present significant fire hazards, particularly if clothing or other flammable materials contact the bulb. Ignition tests have shown that a piece of pine wood ignited in 1 min and 43 s after contact with a 300-watt halogen bulb (6), a piece of cardboard ignited after 1 min and 17 s, and a paper airplane burst into flames after 56 s (6).

Halogen torchiere floor lamps were introduced into the United States in 1983. By 1997, 40 million lamps were in use in homes (6). According to the United States Consumer Prod-

Correspondence: Dr Walter Peters, Division of Plastic Surgery, Wellesley Central Division of St Michael's Hospital, Suite 418, 160 Wellesley Street East, Toronto, Ontario M4Y1J3. Telephone 416-926-7790, fax 416-926-4997, e-mail walter.peters@utoronto.ca

Figure 1) *Appearance of a penis two days after a contact burn from a 150-watt halogen lamp*

uct Safety Commission (CPSC), these lamps caused at least 189 fires and 11 deaths from 1992 to 1997 (5). In response to this hazard, in 1997, the CPSC and the halogen lamp industry

recalled all halogen torchiere floor lamps to install a wire guard over the bulb to prevent flammable materials from contacting the bulb directly. In addition, the CPSC is currently working with Underwriters Laboratories in the United States to recommend that mandatory guards be placed on all halogen lamps (4,5).

Although the use of guards will reduce the potential fire hazard from halogen lamps, the CPSC has also listed several further safety suggestions for halogen torchiere floor lamps (5). These recommendations include: never placing the lamps near curtains or other cloth window treatments; never draping clothes over the lamps; keeping the lamps away from bedding; never leaving the lamps on when leaving a room or being away from home; to reduce the likelihood of tipover, keeping children and pets away from the lamps; and only using a halogen bulb of 300-watts or less in the lamps. By following these rules, it is hoped that the incidence of fires resulting from these lamps will be reduced.

Serious burns from low power (75- to 150-watt) household halogen lamps are uncommon. The present paper provides a particularly unique contact burn from a 150-watt halogen lamp, and serves to underline the hazardous nature of these potentially harmful lamps.

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