

Burned!

By ERIC PETERS

Superintendent, North Links Golf Course

I finally got Labor Day weekend off. I was picked up in Mankato by my driver in a very nice van and was taken to St. Paul where I spent a nice relaxing 11 days in a very expensive hotel. Every morning I had breakfast in bed then proceeded to get a sponge bath by a man named Wayne. It's not what it sounds like. For one, Wayne was the name of the nurse, and two, the only reason I was relaxed was that I was on good pain meds.

It was business as usual at North Links on Sep. 3rd. We got the crew going on the course with the exception of one guy that called in letting me know he was running about 15 minutes late. I was a bit irritated by his being late, yet thankful that he called to let me know. In hindsight, his getting there when he did was God sent and saved me at least 15 minutes of pain. After making a call to the local sheriff's department to let them know that we were having a controlled burn of a brush pile. I proceeded to put 4 gallons of diesel fuel on the pile, then another 4 gallons of gasoline on that to get the wet wood hot enough to burn. Using a little more gasoline, I made a trail in the dirt to light the fire from a distance. I gave it a couple of minutes to soak while I put away the buckets that were used to carry the fuel. When I came back to the brush pile, I could still see the trail in the dirt so without a second thought, I bent over with a lighter and spun the flint. At

that moment my vacation began.

Fire immediately filled the air around me. My first reaction was to close my eyes and run away. After getting a couple steps away I went to the ground and

another radio ready, the gentleman that called in late was standing in the shop looking at my face with concern. He got in the driver's seat of my truck and took me to the ER in Mankato.

While driving to the hospital, I still didn't understand what happened. I had burned brush like this dozens of times with no problems. I called my wife on the way to let her know what had happened and that I wouldn't know how bad it was until I saw a doctor. By the time we got to the ER I think that I was coming out of shock because the pain was getting worse and worse so an IV was started and morphine was used to help with the pain. The doctor there

found that I had burned my arms and face. I was wearing a visor so I had a band of untouched hair around my head and everything that had clothes covering it was untouched by the fire.

Because they were not comfortable with a burn of this size, I was taken to Regions Hospital in St. Paul. The doctor there asked if it had been humid and I told him that in fact it was foggy at the time of the fire. **He then told me that high humidity holds down the fumes of gasoline and creates an explosive environment, and that if I would have done it a few hours later it might not have happened.** Apparently they get a lot of farmers coming in with the same type of burns.

He reassured me that my face would heal with no scarring but they might have to graft areas of my right hand and arm. Two days before the grafting was scheduled, the skin on my right arm peeled off and a layer of good skin was present, so the grafts were not needed. I have nothing but good things to say about the burn unit at Regions. They have a top-notch group of people there and seem to really know their stuff. They even have an annual benefit tournament at North Oaks.



Megan, Eric and Kirsten Peters soon after the accident.

rolled my face in the dirt while thinking "Why did my head catch on fire and when will it stop burning? Is it safe to stand up now?" So after doing this for a few seconds I stood up to see if my shirt was burning. When I looked at my arm I noticed that a layer or two of skin was hanging down below my elbows.

Realizing very quickly that this was going to need medical attention, I calmly walked over to my cart and reached for my walky-talky to call for someone to drive me to ER. I noticed that my hands were shaking and my radio must have fallen off my belt when I was on the ground. I really didn't want to go back by the fire so I drove my cart to the shop to get another radio. Before I could get

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After spending a few days around people that were damaged beyond recognition, I can't help but feel very fortunate about how things could have been different. My eyes were not damaged, the only scarring that I have is on the back of my right hand and elbow, I didn't have that much pain, and my skin is healing unbelievably fast. I attribute this to the prayers of my family and friends. God works in funny ways and I know that I will be a better husband and father as a result, even though I didn't realize this when it happened.

You can imagine all of the horrible images that were running through Diane's (my wife) head by the time she got to the hospital. I think it was harder on her than it was on me. She faithfully handled life with our three kids for those 11 days that I was in the hospital just as she has for the last 10 years. God has blessed me with a fantastic woman and three great kids that I appreciate now more than ever.

When I got out of the hospital, I was a little stir crazy. I was only home for one day before going back to work and that

was about all that I could handle. I was worried about how the course was doing and couldn't handle being away, yet when I came back everything was running smoothly and hadn't skipped a beat.

This was Korey Edholm's (my assistant) first season in the position and he really took the bull by the horns for those 12 days. The whole crew did for that matter. They all know what to do and got the job done. I can't imagine working for a better company. Even the owner of the course stopped by the hospital and was

not only concerned about how I was doing, but also how my family was, and if there was anything that he could do to help. That kind of support at work is worth a lot more than a huge paycheck.

It is very humbling to tell this story to my peers, but if it will prevent even one person from making the same mistake that I did, it is worth it. After talking to a lot of you at the Green Expo, it sounds like I was not the only one who lit fires this way. I have no problem with using fuel to get a fire going, just don't use gaso-



line.

We have been doing a lot of tree trimming this past year and have had two more brush fires since then. We now use diesel fuel and a torch. The sound of 30 foot flames still makes my heart pound but I know that it is in control and has no explosive tendencies. Another option is to call your local fire department and ask them to come and do the burn.

Take care of yourself. Life changes in a blink of an eye.

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