

Celebrate carefully; fires are dangerous

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Count me among those eagerly anticipating two Tar Heel Final Four victories. The success that Coach Williams and our outstanding student-athletes have enjoyed this season shows why Carolina is such a wonderful place.

After victories of this magnitude, it's only natural to head to Franklin Street to celebrate with friends, family and other fans. As we celebrate, however, remember that there are some things that we really shouldn't do because it's just not safe.

As a medical professional who cares for patients who have suffered burns, I'm appealing to everyone to refrain from setting and jumping through bonfires on Franklin Street. In just a few seconds, the injury suffered in one of these seemingly innocent bonfires can change a life forever and turn what was a happy moment into tragedy. It's already happened. In a two-year period, my colleagues and I at the North Carolina Jaycee Burn Center at UNC Health Care saw 11 burn injuries reported after UNC basketball victory celebrations.

Consider:

- * The average age of the injured person was 21.8 years; the range in ages of those injured was between 17 and 28 years old.
- * The burn size on those hurt ranged from 2 percent to 22 percent total body surface area; the average was 6.4 percent.
- * The injured areas involved included arms, legs and backs.
- * Several people were admitted to the hospital, and skin grafting was required in some cases.
- * Hospital charges frequently added up in thousands of dollars.
- * While alcohol was involved in some instances, in other cases the person injured was bumped or accidentally pushed into the fire.

These facts in 2007 led our campus and local communities — including students, faculty, administrators and town leaders — to educate us and each other about the dangers of post-victory bonfires on Franklin Street. We wrote newspaper columns, passed resolutions, sent out e-mails and held forums to encourage us to celebrate our team's wonderful accomplishments in a way that avoids dangerous fires and unnecessary injuries.

We remain pleased with the generally positive response these initiatives have generated. Fortunately, no one has been admitted this year with a post-victory fire injury even though there were some impromptu bonfires on Franklin Street after this year's victories over Duke.

The true test will come after Tar Heel victories on Saturday and Monday.

While we are proud of what we do in the Burn Center for those who suffer injuries — and we invite anyone to come and visit to learn more about how we care for our patients — we know that prevention is the best way to treat a burn.

The injuries associated with these bonfires are tragic not only because they can be so devastating, but also because they are so completely preventable.

Please help celebrate UNC basketball's tremendous accomplishments the right way. Don't put yourself, your friends or innocent bystanders at risk because of a bonfire. We at the Burn Center don't want to have to care for another person with one of these bonfire injuries.