

## Sauna Health and Safety

Saunas are now common in many premises, not just at leisure centres and swimming pools, but at private members clubs, in hotel fitness suites and even in private homes. They provide a way of de-stressing and can be invigorating. However, any organization or company that operates a sauna and makes it available to member of the public, club members, and guests must ensure that the hazards are understood and the risks are assessed and properly controlled in order to reduce the likelihood of an accident. Since accidents may result in costly claims taking appropriate action should reduce the likelihood of litigation. There is a small chance of accidents, to both employees and users, but the adoption of safe methods of operation and use should reduce these risks to an acceptable level. Typically accidents and injuries will fall into one of the following categories:

- Slipping or Tripping:
- Burns and Scalds:
- Cuts:

### The Equipment

It is important that the sauna is safe and free from risk.

**Design:** Ensure that the sauna is properly designed for its intended use. This can most easily be achieved by purchasing a purpose-made sauna from a reputable supplier.

**Installation:** Consider installation by the supplier as part of the contract of sale. If this is not possible then installation should be carried out by a suitable firm who can provide proof of competence and expertise.

**Inspections:** Once installed, the sauna must be regularly inspected to ensure that it remains safe and fit for use. Such inspections must include all the electrical equipment as well as items such as the guards around heaters and seating. Inspections should also include checks on thermal cut-outs to ensure that they have not been “overridden” by users attempting to get hotter conditions. The manufacturer

or supplier will advise on the frequency of the inspections and what should be included on the inspection checklist. Some manufacturers offer an “planned maintenance” service.

**Maintenance:** The manufacturer/supplier should provide information on routine maintenance tasks such as testing of the electrical installation. But following inspection there may be a need to carry out simple “running repairs” e.g. removing a sharp edge on seating.

**Cleaning:** Clean the sauna on a regular basis, at least daily. Remove any waste paper, clean floors and seating with disinfectant. (Note: Cleaning may require the sauna be taken out of service e.g. if strong chemical cleaners are used).

### Management Procedures

A few simple procedures are essential:

**Risk Assessment:** As with any equipment a risk assessment should be carried out to ensure that all possible hazards have been identified, the risks assessed and suitable and appropriate actions implemented.

**Accident Reporting:** Establish a formal procedure to ensure that all accidents are reported and subject to appropriate investigation.

**Emergency Action:** Ensure that the fire alarm can be heard inside the sauna. Decide whether to install an additional alarm located within or immediately outside the sauna. Such an alarm could be used for requesting help if a user were taken ill.

### Hazards

There are a number of hazards that might be encountered:

**Slips and Trips:** Wet floors can often be the cause of relatively minor slips and trips but, can result also in

serious injury e.g. a user may strike their head on the floor or seating.

**Hot Surfaces:** Contact with hot surfaces e.g. the heater surface could result in serious burns and the steam could cause scalds.

**Electricity:** As the heaters are electrically powered there is risk of electric shock. The presence of steam and water increases the risk of a serious injury. Safe installation and suitable preventive maintenance should reduce this risk to an acceptable level.

**Substances:** In some saunas “additives” are used to create scented steam, to reduce the possibility of any harmful effects it is essential that clear instructions for use are given.

**Sharp Edges/Corners:** The hot, damp atmosphere within a sauna means that bare timber seating is the most durable. When installed it should be free of sharp projecting corners and splinters. However, over time and with heavy use cracks and splinters may arise and these could cause nasty injuries, especially since little or no clothing is worn. Routine inspections should spot damage before accidents occur.

### **Employee Safety**

The risk of accident or injury involving employees is remote. Perhaps the greatest risk is to cleaning staff who are exposed to the same risk of slipping and tripping as users and who also face risks from the use of potentially harmful cleaning materials. Training in the correct use of potentially hazardous substances is required under the WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System)

### **User Safety**

Saunas are relatively simple but it should not be assumed that all users are familiar with safe operation.

### **Safe Equipment**

This is fundamental and the selection of a suitable supplier, correct installation and a programme of inspection and maintenance should ensure that the sauna is as safe as it can be during use.

### **Precautionary Advice and Instruction**

Provide users with advice prior to using the sauna. Include inadvisability of using the sauna after consuming alcohol or suffering from a heart condition.

Children under 16 should not be permitted to use the sauna unless accompanied by an adult. Users should also be warned if perfume, oils or similar are used in case they have an allergy to such substances. Advise, if feeling unwell, dizzy or faint to leave the sauna immediately.

### **Instructions for Use**

Many users are familiar with saunas but do not assume all users know the safe approach. Instructions should be given on arrival and also posted outside the sauna. These should include information on heater controls and the safe methods of use. Ideally they should offer guidance about length of use, the importance of taking breaks, visiting the plunge pool etc. There should be clear instructions about matters such as “solo use” (if permitted) and how to raise the alarm in the event of an emergency.

### **Post Sauna**

Users should be advised to take a shower and rest for a short period after using the sauna.

### **Supervision**

Given that the majority of users will be “regulars” often using the sauna as part of a group, routine inspection during use e.g. every few minutes should not be necessary. However, consideration should be given to carrying out routine checks, at two hourly intervals. There should be a formal check at the end of the working day.

### **Key Action Points**

- Establish safe operating practices for saunas – for both employees and users.
- Carry out risk assessments to ensure that all hazards are identified, and suitably controlled
- In the event of an accident to either an employee or user, carry out an immediate investigation. All evidence and relevant documents (e.g. Accident Book or report form, accident investigation report, photos, plans and security videos, copies of risk assessments.) should be retained in case of a claim

### **References**

Hardfact Sauna Fire Safety (A-5731)

Hardfact Swimming Pools and Hot Tubs (A-5730)