



The Agony an Exploding Gel Candle Can Cause

By Michelle Shebloski Weyer

It was mid-October, and I was home with my 5-year-old daughter, who was sick with a stomach bug. About lunchtime, I lit a peach-scented gel candle in her bathroom. Located on a shelf above the commode, this candle had fish and seashells in the gel, and it matched the décor of the bathroom.

My daughter later wanted to watch a movie with me in the living room. While

sitting on the couch with her, I heard something fall in the bathroom but didn't think much about it. I figured one of my cats just was playing with something and nearly didn't go check on the situation.

When I got to the bathroom, I saw the candle's glass container had fallen, and the burning candle had broken. I grabbed the candle and was moving it toward the sink when it suddenly exploded and went all over my bathroom and right hand. I thought the house surely would burn down. Only when I had made sure the candle was out did I realize my hand was on fire. I first shook my hand, then tucked it to my body. In a state of shock, I didn't realize my hand still was burning, even though the fire was out.

My daughter, meanwhile, went and got my husband, who was sleeping. He insisted that I go to the emergency room, where doctors wrapped my hand and sent me home with a recommendation to see a plastic surgeon. I don't remember much about that weekend because of all the pain medications I was taking. I never had experienced such intense pain.

The plastic surgeon I saw was sure my hand would require skin grafts, and he thought I would lose some mobility. He recommended that I go to a burn unit in Mobile, Ala., and let experts there handle my problem. I spent three days in the burn unit, having dead tissue scrubbed off my hand and receiving medications, before being released to my plastic surgeon.

Three months have passed since this incident occurred, and, with the help of daily rehabilitation exercises, I've regained strength and full mobility in my hand. I'm lucky to have only minimal scarring and some sensitivity to heat and cold.

Most importantly, I'm thankful my daughter didn't go into the bathroom that day, and the candle didn't hit me in the face. I'll never again light a candle in a glass container. ❌

What You Should Know When Buying Gel Candles

It pays to find out what the manufacturer has done to make any product safe before you buy it,

and gel candles are no exception to that rule.

For example, Penreco, the only company with a patent on candle gel, makes sure their gel always meets certain safety standards. A few gel-candle companies, however, don't use Penreco. Instead, they use gel made by themselves or others, which means each batch can vary. While those companies may use some safety measures, Penreco ensures its product is 100 percent consistent.

The company has established guidelines candle makers must follow when using Penreco gel. These guidelines require the makers to test the fragrance they plan to use to make sure it is gel safe. They must use only a certain amount of fragrance and not exceed the limit. Makers also have to ensure no flammable objects are inside candles anywhere near the wick.

Safe gel-candle makers go through a process to make sure your candles don't pose a danger when they arrive. The makers test-burn the candles and experiment with different glassware. They also use only lead-free wicks that are the best for gel-candle use.

It's the responsibility of consumers to follow the warning labels accompanying any product. One of the common instructions for a gel candle is that failure to follow the instructions could result in fire, injury or smoke damage. Here are some other frequent warnings you should heed:

- Wick must be kept centered and trimmed to one-eighth to one-quarter inch to prevent smoking and soot buildup.
- Burn only on a stable, heat-resistant surface, no more than four hours at a time. If the flame gets too large or the exposed wick is taller than one-quarter inch, extinguish and trim.
- Keep away from drafts and flammable materials.
- Do not allow matches or wick trimming to fall into melt pool.
- Discontinue use when only one-half inch of gel remains in the bottom.
- Do not move while burning or while gel is still hot.
- Keep away from children and pets.
- Never leave a burning candle unattended. ❌