Assess Your Technology Ladder When Addressing Burn Risk

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Turbine engine hot-section manufacturing highlights the link between technology and risk of burn injuries.

There are few more sophisticated and complex high-heat metallurgy manufacturing processes — and few with less tolerance for error — than the processes involved in manufacturing components of the hot-section of an aviation gas turbine engine. This precision minimizes the risk of catastrophic aviation disasters such as uncontrolled engine failure.

Involving super-heated, liquefied metals and extremely hot smelters, furnaces, crucibles or molds, it might be assumed that hot-section manufacturing constitutes a high-risk burn environment.

Actually, the danger of serious burns in any manufacturing environment often are misunderstood or underappreciated — as are the staggering human and economic costs. With a single bad burn, a worker can be scarred for life, and manufacturers or insurers may be exposed to tens of millions of dollars in worker's compensation payments, settlements or verdicts. And no class of burns creates greater tragedy or higher financial costs than 4th degree, full-thickness burns to the hands and face associated with super-hot metal production.

Just to illustrate, burn-center treatment of a 4th degree burn covering 20 percent of a victim's body — a "serious large burn" — easily can exceed $750,000 for the first few months of intensive treatment at a burn center. Reconstructive surgery can continue for decades, and pain and the humiliation of disfigurement can be a life-long burden for the victim.

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