

Microwave Oven Safety

USC

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ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & SAFETY

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Microwave ovens are one of the leading home products associated with scald burn injuries not related to fires. Foods that are left cooking too long in microwaves are also responsible for the majority of false fire alarms on campus, particularly in the residence halls. Below are some facts and recommendations regarding the safe use of microwaves for popcorn and other foods.

How to Safely Microwave Popcorn

- Not all microwaves are alike. Set your microwave oven on the manufacturer's recommended time. High-power models (e.g., 1,100 watts) may take just over 1.5 minutes.
- Listen carefully and stop the microwave when rapid popping slows to two or three seconds between pops.
- If you're using a microwave oven with a carousel, make sure the bag is centered (with proper side down) on it and can rotate freely. The bag stopping could cause the popcorn to scorch.
- Don't leave your microwave unattended while popping corn. It's important to watch the bag to make sure it inflates properly while the popcorn is popping. A bag that hasn't inflated right will scorch very quickly.
- Be careful when opening a sealed cooking bag. Steam and hot pressurized air built up in the bag continues to cook after the container is out of the microwave.

General Safety Instructions

- Don't use metal such as metal-edged bowls, plates or cups, tin foil, or even twist-ties in the oven. Watch for hidden bits of metal. The metal can spark and can both damage the unit and lead to a fire.
- To find out if glass is safe for microwave use: Microwave the empty container for one minute. It's unsafe for the microwave if it's warm; it's safe for reheating if it's lukewarm; and it's safe for actual cooking if it's cool.
- Open microwaved food slowly, away from the face. Hot steam escaping from a container of microwaved food or the food itself can cause burns.
- Never heat a baby bottle in a microwave oven because it heats liquids unevenly. Heat baby bottles in warm water.

In Case of a Fire in a Microwave

- If you have a fire in the microwave, unplug the unit.
- Do not open the door until the flames die out. Air will just feed the fire.

Please contact EH&S at 213-740-6448 for more information.

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