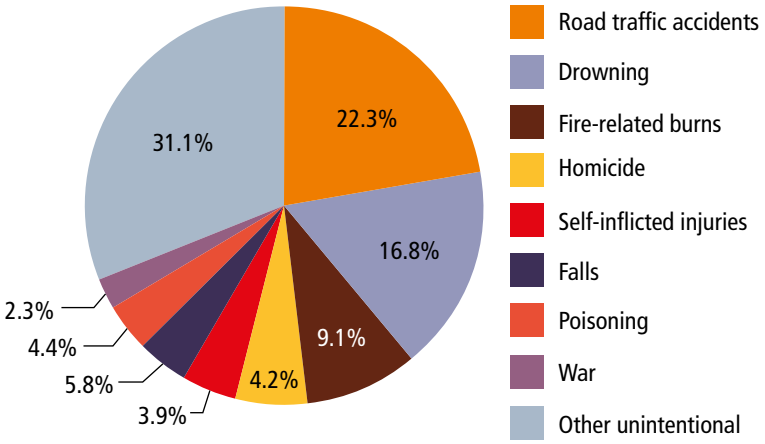
Paraffin poisoning in children

Global facts

- Approximately 950 000 children (under the age of 18) die every year as a result of injuries and violence.
- 90% of these deaths are categorised as 'unintentional' with 3.9% being poisoning-related.
- In addition, millions of children require hospital care every year for non-fatal injuries, and many are left with lifelong disabilities, such as weakened lungs due to pneumonitis (paraffin-related pneumonia).

Figure 1: Distribution of global child injury deaths by cause, 0-17 years (WHO, 2004)



"The most common agents involved in childhood poisonings in low-income and middle-income countries are hydrocarbons… such as paraffin." (WHO, 2008)

South African facts

Paraffin constitutes 56% of the energy mix used in an estimated 21 million low-income households in South Africa, for cooking, lighting and heating.

The dangers of paraffin

- Paraffin is highly flammable and can lead to fires, deaths and burn injuries.
- Two hospital-based studies in the Western Cape indicate that 12–25% of burn injuries were due to paraffin stoves; and that urban, poor children are particularly vulnerable. (MRC, 2005)

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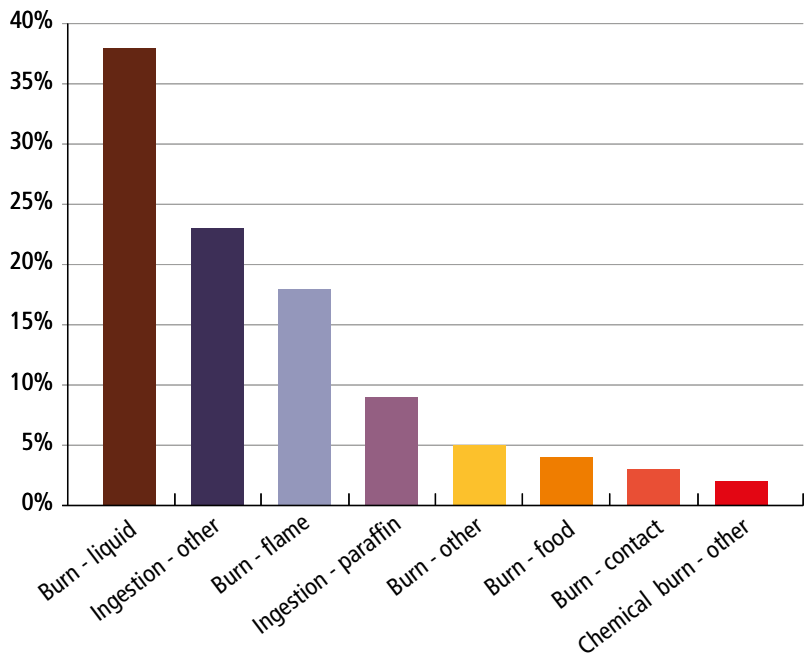
Figure 2: Prevalence of energy-related injuries
(Paraffin Safety Association of Southern Africa, PASASA, 2012)



Scalds and flame burns account for 56% and 27% of all recorded burns.

Paraffin ingestions account for 25% of all recorded ingestions.

- In 2004, poisoning was the fourth most likely cause of unintentional death for children under the age of 4.
- In 2005, it was estimated that paraffin ingestion was 40 000–60 000 annually.
- 3.6% of households visited in rural KwaZulu-Natal had experienced paraffin ingestion. (Matzopoulus & Carolissen, 2005; 2006)
- In 2007, it was estimated that 171–498 children who were treated for paraffin ingestion at hospitals, died. (MRC, 2007)
- In 2008, 60% of paediatric poisonings in South Africa were due to accidental paraffin poisoning – attributed to paraffin having the consistency and appearance of water and being stored in reused beverage containers without child-resistant caps.
- Young children (0–3 years) are at greatest risk of accidental paraffin poisoning, thereafter the incidence rate declines but increases again from 15–34 years.

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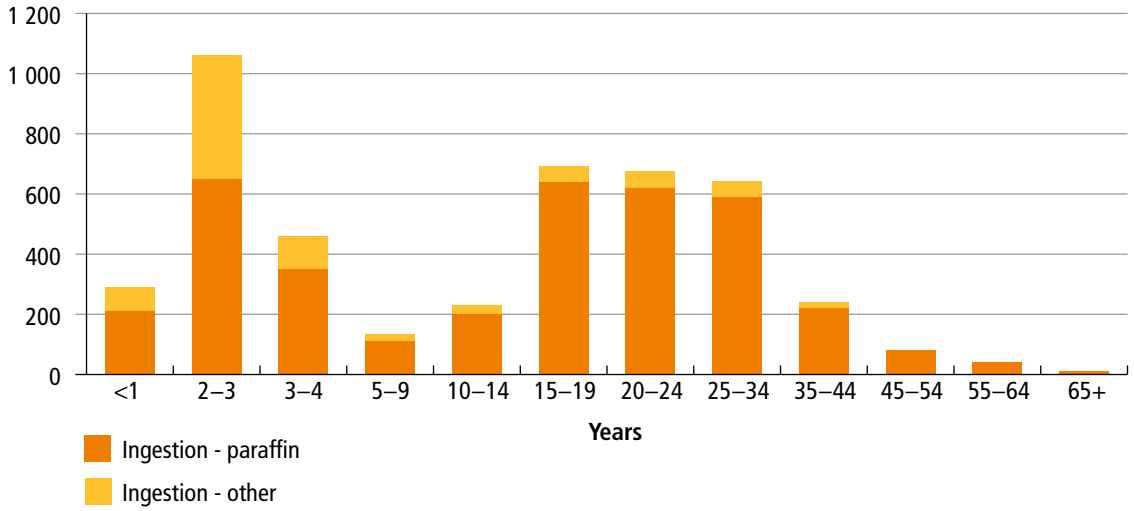
Figure 3: Age categories and poison ingestions
(Paraffin Safety Association of Southern Africa, PASASA, 2012)



Safety concerns

The health and safety concerns related to paraffin usage are extremely high and urgently need to be addressed. Successful paraffin safety interventions must address the safety needs of children in the home, including:

- consistent supervision of young children
- ensuring all energy-related appliances are kept out of reach
- storing poisonous liquids like paraffin in appropriate, childproof containers and locations.

References

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For more facts and figures on household energy and safety, go to the fact sheets and resources at **www.hesasa.org**

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