

# ECT: Patient Burned, Cause Disputed.

The Court of Appeals of Ohio ruled the local county court judge erroneously rushed to judgment that the patient's caregivers were not at fault. The Court reinstated the patient's lawsuit.

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***There are several plausible explanations for the fire.***

***It is not clear if the patient's doctor or nurse were at fault, but the patient is at least entitled to her day in court before a jury.***

COURT OF APPEALS OF OHIO  
July 13, 2007

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The patient got second- and third-degree facial burns from a fire that started just as current was activated through the electrodes attached to her head for electroconvulsive therapy (ECT).

The nurse testified the flames started at the electrode at the side of her head and were fueled by maximum-flow O<sub>2</sub> from a wall port leaking from her mask.

The patient's medical expert traced the flames to a spark arching from one electrode to the other due to flammable hair-spray or face cream or antiseptic used to clean and prep the skin for the electrodes, with the O<sub>2</sub> vigorously contributing to the fire once it started.

The patient's expert was equivocal, however, when it came to assigning blame. He admitted he could not say if the patient's nurse or physician improperly prepared or prepped the patient for her procedure, improperly secured one or both of the electrodes on her skin or if, instead, there was an unexpected and unexplained malfunction of the equipment in use.

However, as the court said, "Medical treatment should not involve setting a patient's head on fire." ***Powell v. Hawkins***, 2007 WL 2019802 (Ohio App., July 13, 2007).