Electrosurgical devices, lasers cited as most common igniters of operating room fires

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While operating room fires can occur in a variety of clinical settings, it is the use of lasers and electrosurgical devices that are most likely to cause them. Those are the findings in new research presented at the 2009 American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery Foundation (AAO-HNSF) Annual Meeting & OTO EXPO, in San Diego, CA.

The study's authors discovered that among a group of 349 otolaryngologists, a quarter (25.2%) had at least witnessed an operating room fire during the course of their career, and several had witnessed multiple fires (sometimes as many as five). A large majority of the fires (81%) occurred when supplemental oxygen was being used, and the most common sources of ignition were electrosurgical units (59%), lasers (32%), and light cords (7%).

In order to minimize the risk of fire, the authors conclude that surgeons, particularly otolaryngologists (because of the nature of the surgical procedures they perform), must familiarize themselves with the common scenarios in which fires might occur.

Source: American Academy of Otolaryngology