

HEAT TRANSFER MODEL TO PREDICT SKIN BURN INJURY FOR  
FIREFIGHTERS

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother. May Allah grants her a place in Jannah. To my family thank you for supports and sacrifices throughout the PhD journey.

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## ABSTRACT

Skin burn injury is common among firefighters despite being encapsulated in the personal protective clothing. However, it is complex to predict skin burn during actual firefighting scenarios due to complex clothing geometries and thermal hazard environment. The objectives of this research were to develop a heat transfer model for predicting skin burn injury for firefighters and identify the causative factors affecting skin burn. A heat transfer model of a multilayer personal protective clothing furnished with human skin was developed using the Finite Element Method. The model considered bioheat equations that includes metabolic heat generation and blood perfusion for predicting skin burn injury. The model employed a quarter cylinder (radial) geometry to represent human limb overlays with Aralite material under wet and dry conditions. The factors such as air gap, heat flux and vapour were considered in skin burn analysis. The validation of the model was carried out by comparing skin temperatures at specified positions based on the published experimental data. The percentage error is less than 17% which is acceptable according to ASHRAE's prescription. The result shows that air gap thickness of 1 mm able to reduce the skin temperature by 10°C and the skin temperature can be reduced further as the air gap thickened. In dry conditions, each 1000 W/m<sup>2</sup> increment of heat flux will increase the skin temperature by 2°C. While, in wet condition, a significant increase of 4°C of the skin temperature was observed for every 1000 W/m<sup>2</sup> increment due the material properties of the personal protective clothing when it was altered and enhanced heat transfer across multiple layers of wet fabric. The presence of vapour under a constant heat flux of 7000 W/m<sup>2</sup> for 25 seconds increases the skin temperature by 10°C. Based on transient heat transfer analysis, it was observed that steam burn injury occurred due to vapour. The research had developed a parametric study based on the three causative factors specifically for Aralite material. The model could benefit designers in producing and improving protective personal clothing for firefighters.

## ABSTRAK

Kecederaan kulit terbakar adalah kecederaan biasa dikalangan anggota bomba walaupun mereka telah memakai pakaian peralatan perlindungan diri. Namun begitu, sukar untuk meramalkan kecederaan kulit terbakar kerana geometri pakaian yang kompleks dan bahaya tegasan haba di persekitaran. Objektif kajian adalah untuk membangunkan model pemindahan haba bagi meramalkan luka terbakar dikalangan anggota bomba dan mengenalpasti factor yang memberi kesan kepada luka terbakar. Model pemindahan haba terdiri daripada lapisan pakaian perlindungan diri dan kulit manusia menggunakan teknik *Finite Element Method*. Kajian ini menggunakan persamaan bio haba untuk menentukan suhu permukaan kulit manusia dengan mengambil kira pengaruh kadar metabolik and kadar aliran darah. Model yang dicadangkan ialah dalam bentuk geometri suku silinder (radial) yang mewakili bentuk tangan dan kaki manusia menggunakan bahan Aralite di bawah keadaan kering dan lembap. Kajian ini disahkan melalui perbandingan hasil kajian model penyelidikan yang lain. Nilai ralat kurang dari 17% mematuhi nilai yang ditetapkan oleh ASHREA. Faktor seperti ruang udara, fluks haba dan kelembapan diambilkira dalam analisis kulit terbakar. Keputusan menunjukkan peningkatan ketebalan ruang udara sebanyak 1mm dapat menurunkan suhu permukaan kulit sebanyak 10°C. Suhu permukaan kulit berkurang sekiranya ruang udara semakin tebal. Dalam keadaan kering, kenaikan fluks haba 1000W/m<sup>2</sup> menyebabkan peningkatan suhu permukaan kulit sebanyak 2°C. Manakala dalam lembap setiap kenaikan fluks haba 1000W/m<sup>2</sup> menyebabkan peningkatan 4°C suhu permukaan kulit. Kehadiran wap di bawah fluks haba 7000W/m<sup>2</sup> yang tetap selama 25saat akan meningkatkan suhu sebanyak 10°C. Ini kerana perubahan sifat bahan and peningkatan pemindahan haba melalui lapisan fabrik yang lembap. Berdasarkan analisis pemindahan haba dalam keadaan *transient*, hasil kajian mendapati kehadiran wap menyebabkan berlakunya kejadian luka terbakar akibat stim. Kajian ini telah membangunkan kajian parametrik berdasarkan tiga faktor utama untuk bahan Aralite. Model ini sangat bermanfaat untuk membuat dan memperbaiki rekaan pakaian perlindungan diri dikalangan anggota bomba.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|      |   |                                    |
|------|---|------------------------------------|
| SCBA | - | Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus |
| SOP  | - | Standard Operating Procedure       |
| TPP  | - | Thermal Protective Performance     |
| RPP  | - | Radiant Protective Performance     |
| TPI  | - | Thermal Performance Index          |
| HTF  | - | Transmission Factor                |
| RHTI | - | Radiant Heat Transfer Index        |
| HTI  | - | Heat Transfer Index                |
| SEI  | - | Stored Energy Index                |
| PDE  | - | Partial Differential Equation      |
| CFD  | - | Computational Fluid Dynamic        |
| FEM  | - | Finite Element Method              |
| FDM  | - | Finite Difference Method           |
| GIT  | - | Grid Independent Test              |
| GCI  | - | Grid Convergence Index             |
| FVM  | - | Finite Volume Method               |
| R    | - | Convergence Ratio                  |

## LIST OF SYMBOLS

|                  |   |  |
|------------------|---|--|
| $T$              | - | Temperature                                |
| $x$              | - | Thickness                                  |
| $q\dot{m}$       | - | Metabolic heat generation                  |
| $q\dot{p}$       | - | Blood perfusion heat rates                 |
| $k$              | - | Thermal conductivity                       |
| $w$              | - | Volumetric blood flow                      |
| $\rho_b$         | - | Blood density                              |
| $c_b$            | - | Blood thermal conductivity                 |
| $T_a$            | - | Arterial temperature                       |
| $L_m$            | - | Muscle thickness                           |
| $L_{sk}$         | - | Skin thickness                             |
| $T_\infty$       | - | Surrounding temperature                    |
| $T_c$            | - | Core temperature                           |
| $T_i$            | - | Temperature at between muscle and skin     |
| $T_{sk}$         | - | Skin temperature                           |
| $q$              | - | Heat transfer rate                         |
| $R_{tot}$        | - | Total thermal resistance                   |
| $L_{sk}$         | - | Skin thickness                             |
| $k_{sk}$         | - | Thermal conductivity of the skin           |
| $A$              | - | Skin surface area                          |
| $h_c$            | - | Convection heat transfer coefficient       |
| $h_r$            | - | Radiation heat transfer coefficient        |
| $\theta_{(0)}$   | - | Excess temperature at boundary             |
| $\theta_{(L_m)}$ | - | Excess temperature at muscle               |
| $\theta_c$       | - | Excess temperature at core                 |
| $\theta_i$       | - | Excess temperature between muscle and skin |
| $\theta$         | - | Excess temperature                         |
| $x$              | - | thickness                                  |
| $\tilde{m}$      | - | Mass flux                                  |



|                     |   |  |
|---------------------|---|--|
| $q _{yx=Lm}$        | - | Heat transfer leaving the muscle                   |
| $k_m$               | - | Thermal conductivity of the muscle                 |
| $q_{cond} _{x=Lsk}$ | - | Heat transfer by conduction through the skin layer |
| $q_{rad}$           | - | Heat transfer by radiation                         |
| $q_{conv}$          | - | Heat transfer by convection                        |
| $\rho$              | - | Effective density                                  |
| $\epsilon_{bw}$     | - | Volume fraction of water absorbed in solid phase   |
| $\rho_w$            | - | Water density                                      |
| $\epsilon_{ds}$     | - | Volume fraction of the dry solid fibre (constant)  |
| $\rho_{ds}$         | - | density of dry solid                               |
| $\epsilon_\gamma$   | - | volume fraction in the gas phase                   |
| $\rho_v$            | - | density of water vapour                            |
| $\rho_a$            | - | density of dry air                                 |
| $c_p$               | - | effective specific heat                            |
| $(c_p)_w$           | - | specific heat of liquid water                      |
| $(c_p)_{ds}$        | - | specific heat of dry solid                         |
| $(c_p)_v$           | - | specific heat of water vapour                      |
| $(c_p)_a$           | - | specific heat of dry air                           |
| $k_{eff}$           | - | effective thermal conductivity of the fabric       |
| $k_\sigma$          | - | thermal conductivity of the solid phase            |
| $k_\gamma$          | - | thermal conductivity of the gas phase              |
| $k_v$               | - | thermal conductivity of the saturated water vapour |
| $k_a$               | - | thermal conductivity of the dry air                |
| $k_w$               | - | thermal conductivity of the liquid water           |
| $k_{ds}$            | - | thermal conductivity of the dry solid              |
| $\rho_g$            | - | density of the gaseous phase                       |
| $(c_p)_g$           | - | specific heat of gas phase                         |
| $\epsilon_l$        | - | volume fraction for liquid                         |
| $\epsilon_b$        | - | volume fraction for bound water                    |
| $\epsilon_f$        | - | volume fraction for fibre                          |
| $\epsilon_g$        | - | volume fraction for gas                            |

|                    |   |  |
|--------------------|---|--|
| $k_g$              | - | thermal conductivity for gas phase                     |
| $k_s$              | - | thermal conductivity for solid phase                   |
| $k_l$              | - | thermal conductivity of the free liquid water          |
| $\rho_l$           | - | density of the free liquid                             |
| $\rho_f$           | - | density of the dry fibre                               |
| $k_b$              | - | thermal conductivity of the bound water                |
| $k_f$              | - | thermal conductivity of the fibre                      |
| $(c_p)_l$          | - | specific heat of liquid                                |
| $(c_p)_b$          | - | specific heat of bound water                           |
| $(c_p)_f$          | - | specific heat of fibre                                 |
| $(c_p)_v$          | - | specific heat of water vapour                          |
| $(c_p)_a$          | - | specific heat of dry air                               |
| $F_s$              | - | Safety factor  |
| $\varepsilon$      | - | Relative error   |
| $r^p$              | - | ratio of control volumes in the fine and coarse meshes |
| $N_{fine}$         | - | Number of elements for fine mesh                       |
| $N_{coarse}$       | - | Number of elements for coarse mesh                     |
| $f_1$              | - | Solution of fine mesh                                  |
| $f_2$              | - | Solution of medium mesh                                |
| $f_3$              | - | Solution of coarse mesh                                |
| $p$                | - | formal order of accuracy of the algorithm              |
| $R$                | - | Convergence ratio                                      |
| $\varepsilon_{21}$ | - | Relative error for medium and fine mesh solution       |
| $\varepsilon_{32}$ | - | Relative error for coarse and medium mesh solution     |
| $Nu_D$             | - | Nusselt number for long horizontal cylinder            |
| $Ra_D$             | - | Rayleigh number for the long horizontal cylinder       |
| $Pr$               | - | Prandtl Number   |
| $Ra_D$             | - | Rayleigh number for the long horizontal cylinder       |
| $g$                | - | Gravitational acceleration                             |
| $\beta$            | - | Expansion coefficient                                  |
| $D$                | - | Diameter   |

|          |   |   |
|----------|---|---|
| $\nu$    | - | kinematic viscosity                         |
| $\alpha$ | - | thermal diffusivity                         |
| $h$      | - | natural convection coefficient              |
| $Nu_D$   | - | Nusselt number for long horizontal cylinder |

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter identifies the objectives, problem statement, scopes and the significance of the study. The chapter presents the firefighter's thermal hazard during work duty. This chapter elaborates briefly the current methodology to evaluate effectiveness of the flame-retardant material and limitations.

### 1.2 Research Background

The personal protective clothing is worn to protect against thermal hazards. In firefighting, the firefighters are often exposed to extreme heat of radiant, flame, hot gases, steam and explosions. It is very complex to predicts in the firefighting situation because there are factors that need to be considered. In United States, approximately 100 firefighters suffered from critical injuries. There are more than 30000 firefighters subjected to injuries during fire suppression (Karter, 2009). The most common areas suffered from burn injuries is in the head, human limb, neck and shoulder (Karter, 2012). It is found that scalds burns of 65% is one of the common injuries followed by flame burns and the remaining 15% suffered from compression burns (Kahn et al., 2012).

The type of burn degree is classified by the depth of skin injuries. The first degree burns are injuries that only affect the outer layer of the skin surface known as the epidermis. The second degree burn is identified as the wound that penetrates across the dermis. The third degree burn occurs from the epidermis and dermis penetrating through the major third layer of the skin known as the hypodermis (Singer et al., 2014). In order to protect humans against burn injuries, protective clothing is worn. The flame

retardant material comprises of the outer shell, moisture barrier and the thermal liner. The outer shell is the outmost layer of the fabric that is directly in contact with the fire. It is made of Aramid fibre named as Nomex (Hamouda, 2005). The second layer of the fabric is moisture barrier that made of light knitted fibre coated with the outer shell. The thermal liner is the third layer of the fabric that avoids heat transfer penetrating through the skin (Lawson et al., 2005). Despite encapsulated by the flame-retardant material, burn injury still occurred in firefighting.

Heat flux transmitted from these thermal hazards in firefighting scenario ranges from 20 – 160 kW/m<sup>2</sup> and usually occurred during extreme fires and explosions (He et al., 2017). Barr et al. (2010) discovered that the tolerance time for the existing protective clothing that can be sustained by a human under heat flux within 5 to 20 seconds only. Heat transfer by radiation is frequently present in all the thermal hazards. Skin burn injuries can occur under low radiation intensity of heat flux ranging from 5 kW/m<sup>2</sup> to 20 kW/m<sup>2</sup> (Barr et al., 2010). The presence of moisture strongly affects burn injury, as water used to suppress fire and sweat profusion is absorbed through the clothing layers. It alters the material thermal conductivity and specific heat capacity enhanced heat transfer to the skin. Skin burn injury is more severe with moisture rather than with dry clothing material (Keiser, 2007; Keiser et al., 2008; Keiser & Rossi, 2008; Keiser et al., 2010). Furthermore, these exposure causes burn injuries are usually taken within minutes of heat exposure (Holmér et al., 2006a).

The prediction of skin burn can be done by using heat transfer analysis with the mathematical model and experimentation. Both are designed to represent the human skin but predicting the burn injury is extremely difficult because there are many factors affecting burn injuries. However, the prediction of skin temperature can be done if human skin material properties and its material properties are known. Previous researchers utilized bench scale test (G. W. Song et al., 2011) and thermal manikin (Bröde et al., 2008; Ming Fu et al., 2015; Havenith et al., 2006; Havenith et al., 2005; Qian & Fan, 2006; Sun & Fan, 2017). These are done using a specimen of flame-retardant material under continuous fire to determine the skin temperature. Current experimentation is inaccurate as it does not consider the heat gained from metabolic heat to the surrounding skin tissue. However, it is unsafe to use human subject in

experimentation. Therefore, this research will adapt mathematical model from Pennes (1948) bioheat equation in predicting human skin temperature with the blood perfusion and the metabolic heat generations.

Moisture significantly affects the protective clothing thermal protection. According to Keiser and Rossi (2008) steam burn injury occur in wet condition under continuous heat exposure. This causes enhancement of heat transfer across the multilayers fabric developing evaporation and vaporization of moisture. Firefighting requires spraying of water on flame to control fire. This form external source of moisture. While internal moisture source comes from sweating (Keiser & Rossi, 2008).

In this research, a new approach is developed to predict burn injury of personal protective clothing in wet and dry material condition by using the bioheat equation and finite element analysis.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

The current method of predicting skin burn injury is done by using experimental method such as bench scale test, thermal manikin test and test method for wet sample. These methods produce unreliable outcome as they do not represent the behaviour of human skin.

The human skin temperature is not constant. It is affected by blood perfusion, human activities and surroundings conditions. The blood perfusion is influenced by the clothing type and wetness. Human activities are affected by the metabolic rate. The surrounding conditions such as the combination of moisture and heat can cause steam burn injury. Therefore, a model that can predict the human skin temperature without using the human experimentation need to be developed.

There are a number of researchers who developed mathematical model to predict burn injury using one dimensional plane geometry. However, this geometry is not representative of the human limbs because it consists of cylindrical geometry

where the heat transfer is in radial direction. Thus, a quarter cylindrical geometry model has to be developed for a reliable representation of the human limbs in order to predict skin burn.

#### **1.4 Research Question**

The research questions are as follow:

- (a) How to predict firefighter's skin burn injury?
- (b) What are the causative factors affecting skin burn?
- (c) How will moisture in flame retardant material affect skin burn injury ?

#### **1.5 Research Objectives**

The objectives of the study are to:

- (a) Develop heat transfer model for predicting skin burn injury.
- (b) Determine the causative factors affecting skin burn.
- (c) Develop a parametric study for Aralite material.



## **1.6 Research Scope**

The scopes of the research are as follow:

- (d) The heat transfer model developed will be based on the Aralite material under sedentary position.
- (e) The causative factors affecting skin burn that will be studied are the air gap thickness, heat flux and moisture.
- (f) The parametric study of the Aralite material is under wet and dry conditions.

## **1.7 The Significance of the Research**

The proposed model can predict burn injury with consideration of blood perfusion and metabolic heat generation by using Pennes bioheat equation. This is a better representation of the human skin. The proposed model can replace exhaustive experimentation.

The proposed model enables the study of the combined effect of moisture, air gap thickness and the heat flux. These are the most significant factors that influenced the formation of the skin burn injury. Furthermore, it can predict the occurrence of steam burn injury under moisture of wet condition.

Previously researchers have used numerical method to predict firefighter's skin temperature, but they only considered one dimensional plane geometry. However, the proposed model is in one dimensional quarter cylinder (radial) geometry that better represents the human limb and produce reliable outcome in predicting the skin temperature.

The proposed model can be a tool to assess the effectiveness of the protective clothing specifically Aralite material. The model provides systematic procedure and method to assess thermal performance of the flame-retardant material. The proposed model can simulate the thermal hazards that caused skin burns under wet and dry conditions. This can provide understandings of heat transfer mechanisms across the fabric in preventing occurrence of burn injury during firefighting.

## **1.8 The Outline of the Thesis**

Chapter 1 is the introductory of the study to comprehend the thermal hazards of firefighters. It elaborates the methods used to evaluates the flame-retardant material and its limitations. The chapter presented problem statement, research objective and the importance of the research.

Chapter 2 is the literature review of the study. It discusses the material and structure of the protective garments. The significant factors that have effects on skin burn injury are identified based on findings of past researchers. The current methods and limitations that are used to predict skin burn is emphasized.

Chapter 3 presents the methods of the research in chronological order. The materials and procedure in determining skin burn are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 4 discusses the development of the proposed model in determining the firefighter's skin burn under wet and dry conditions. This chapter presents the equation applied in the model. It also shows the development of finite element model. Verification and validation are developed to ensure the model is reliable in predicting skin burn.

Chapter 5 discusses the result of the study. The findings from the proposed model is presented in this chapter. The significant effect of air gap, heat flux and moisture are emphasized in this chapter.

Chapter 6 discusses factors affecting skin burn injury. It discusses the significant factors affecting skin burn. The threshold of predicted pain, first degree burn and second degree burn in body parts are presented in this chapter.

Chapter 7 presents the conclusion of the study. It summarizes the overall important outcomes of this research. It also presents the recommendations for future work.

(e) Expand wet material database

Currently the gas and liquid absorbed in the clothing material is specifically for Aralite material provided by Chittrphiromsri (2005). There are many materials for personal protective clothing available in the market such as combination of Meta-aramid, Polytetraflouroethylene, Nomex and Kevlar (Lawson et al., 2010). However, there is a lack of data on their porosity and absorption characteristics. During firefighting, sweat is produce excessively due to strenuous physical activities (Holmér et al., 2006b). The amount of sweat, liquid and gas absorbed in the material differ depending on the materials porosity. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct further experiment to have more information on the amount bound water, liquid and gas due to the evaporation process for these materials. The amount of bound water, liquid and gas will affect the material properties, thermal performance and tolerance time to burn injury. Therefore, there is a need to expand the thermal protective clothing performance database in wet condition. This will provide a proper guidance for users and the thermal protective clothing designers to provide better protection against heat and fire.

(f) Compression condition

Compression condition of the multilayer's fabric is a significant factor to be considered in the evaluation tool of the personal protective clothing. The compression normally occurs due to human body movement such as crawling and kneeling motion resulting in skin burn. The results show that the skin burn occur faster without air gap. The air gap do not appear if the fabric is compressed and there may be reduction in the amount of moisture absorbed in the fabric. Compression decreases fabric thickness and air gap hence the heat transfer rate will rise and reduces threshold for burn injury. Therefore, there is a necessity to study compression effect to the skin burn injury.

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## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

### Scopus Indexed Journal

1. Zainol, Z. N., Md Tap, M., Mohamed Kamar, H., & Kamsah, N. (2019). Heat Transfer Model to Predict Human Skin Temperature under Comfort Level by using Bioheat Equation. *International Journal of Online and Biomedical Engineering*, 15(10), 52-64.
2. Zainol, Z. N., Md Tap, M., Mohamed Kamar, H., & Kamsah, N. (2019). Heat Transfer Model for Firefighter's Burn Injury. *Indian Journal of Public Health Research & Development*, 10(6), 1510-1515. <https://doi.org/10.5958/0976-5506.2019.01512.2>
3. Zainol, Z. N., Tap, M. M., Kamar, H. M., & Kamash, N. (2019). The effect of air gap and moisture for the skin burn injury of the firefighter's personal protective clothing. *International journal of engineering and advanced technology*, 9(2), 4048-4054. <http://dx.doi.org/10.35940/ijeat.B4943.129219>
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### Proceedings

1. Zainol, Z. N., Md Tap, M., & Mohamed Kamar, H. (2019). Prediction human skin temperature in comfort level. *Science Proceedings Series*, 1(3). <https://doi.org/10.31580/sps.v1i3.857>
2. Zainol, Z. N., Md Tap, M., & Mohamed Kamar, H. (2019). Steam Burn Injury Model of Firefighters Personal Protective Clothing. *Science Proceedings Series*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.31580/sps.v1i1.511>