

Burn Injuries After a Car or Truck Accident in Georgia

The Fire Can Create a Second Injury Event After the Initial Impact

A collision doesn't have to end when the vehicles stop moving. A ruptured fuel system can ignite. Hot fluids can spill into the passenger compartment. A tanker can release flammable or corrosive cargo. Damaged electrical components can create another source of heat or current. When that happens, a crash victim may suffer [serious burn injuries](#) on top of fractures, head trauma, spinal injuries, or other damage from the original impact.

Burn cases are different from many other crash claims because the medical injury and the liability investigation can each have two layers. Doctors have to evaluate not only how deep the burn is, but how much of the body is involved, where it is located, whether smoke was inhaled, and whether the patient has other traumatic injuries. Lawyers may need to determine both who caused the collision and why the fire, explosion, chemical exposure, or electrical injury occurred afterward.

At [Gary Martin Hays & Associates](#), our Georgia personal injury lawyers don't reduce a burn claim to a photograph or a hospital discharge diagnosis. The important questions are what caused the exposure, how the burn evolved, what treatment and reconstruction will be needed, and whether the injury will permanently change movement, appearance, work, or day-to-day independence.

Burn Severity Isn't Measured by “Degree” Alone

People still commonly describe burns as first-, second-, or third-degree. Medical teams now often use terms such as superficial, superficial partial-thickness, deep partial-thickness, and full-thickness because those descriptions tell them more about how much skin and underlying tissue has been damaged.

Depth is only one part of the picture. Burn specialists also look at total body surface area, usually shortened to TBSA, the location of the injury, the patient's age and other medical conditions, pain control, inhalation injury, and whether there are fractures or other major trauma from the crash.

That is why two burns covering the same number of square inches can have very different consequences. A deep burn across a hand, face, foot, or major joint may threaten function or appearance even when the percentage of body surface involved is relatively small. The [American Burn Association](#) recommends immediate burn-center consultation with consideration for transfer for full-thickness burns, partial-thickness burns involving at least 10 percent TBSA, deep partial- or full-thickness burns involving critical areas such as the face, hands, feet, genitalia, perineum, or major joints, and suspected inhalation injuries.

A serious vehicle crash can therefore send someone to a burn center even when the burn isn't the largest injury on the body. The person may also need trauma surgery, orthopedic care, respiratory support, or other treatment at the same time.

How Do Car and Truck Crashes Cause Burn Injuries?

The source of the burn matters medically and legally. A flame injury after a fuel-fed fire isn't evaluated exactly the same way as a chemical exposure from hazardous cargo or an electrical injury from damaged high-voltage components.

- **Thermal Burns:** Open flame, explosions, hot metal, steam, engine fluids, or other heated materials can damage the skin and deeper tissue after a crash.
- **Chemical Burns:** A collision involving industrial chemicals, corrosive materials, battery contents, or hazardous cargo can expose occupants, first responders, and people near the wreck to substances that continue damaging tissue until they are removed or neutralized appropriately.
- **Electrical Burns:** Damaged electrical systems, exposed wiring, downed power lines, or high-voltage vehicle components can cause burns that may involve deeper internal injury beyond what is visible on the skin.
- **Friction Injuries:** A person who is ejected or dragged across pavement can suffer extensive road rash and friction injury. These wounds can require debridement, grafting, and scar management even though they were not caused by flame.
- **Smoke and Inhalation Injury:** A person trapped in or near a burning vehicle may inhale smoke, heated gases, and toxic products of combustion. Serious inhalation injury can occur with or without extensive external burns.

Commercial vehicles can add another layer of risk. [Truck crashes involving burn injuries](#) may involve large fuel tanks or cargo that is itself flammable, corrosive, or toxic. When a [tanker truck crashes and releases dangerous material](#), the fire or chemical exposure can affect people who were never struck directly by the truck.

Smoke Inhalation Can Be as Serious as the External Burns

A burn victim can look relatively intact on the outside and still have a dangerous inhalation injury. Smoke can carry carbon monoxide and other toxic products of combustion, while hot gases and irritants can injure the airway.

Some respiratory problems appear immediately, but others can develop over the next several hours. Airway swelling can progress, and lower-airway injury may not be obvious on an early chest X-ray. That is why facial burns, soot around the mouth or nose, singed facial hair, coughing, wheezing, voice changes, confusion, loss of consciousness, or exposure inside an enclosed burning vehicle can change the urgency of the medical evaluation.

In a legal claim, the inhalation injury shouldn't disappear simply because the most visible photographs show skin burns. Respiratory support, bronchoscopy, carbon-monoxide testing, ventilator care, and later pulmonary problems may represent a separate part of the medical damage.

Skin Grafting Can Create a Second Wound That Also Has to Heal

Deep burns may not heal adequately with dressings alone. Surgeons sometimes remove damaged tissue and cover the wound with a skin graft. That can be lifesaving and function-preserving, but it also means the patient is recovering from more than one injured area.

In an autograft, healthy skin is taken from another part of the patient's body and transferred to the burn wound. The donor site then becomes its own painful wound requiring dressings and healing. Some patients need repeated grafting, reconstructive procedures, or later scar-revision surgery.

Healing also isn't the same thing as returning to normal. Burn scars can become thick, raised, painful, itchy, hypersensitive, or discolored. Scar tissue across a joint can tighten as it matures and form a contracture that restricts movement. When burns affect the hands, elbows, shoulders, knees, ankles, neck, or other mobile areas, physical and occupational therapy may continue long after the wound has closed.

Visible injuries can create another category of loss. Permanent [scarring and disfigurement after an accident](#) may affect self-image, relationships, social interaction, and work in ways that aren't captured by the number of graft procedures in the medical chart. When the face is involved, the long-term effects can overlap with the challenges seen after other [serious facial injuries from car crashes](#).

Who Caused the Crash and Who Caused the Burn May Be Different Questions

This is one of the most important legal issues in a post-crash fire case. The driver who caused the first impact isn't automatically the only party whose conduct matters.

Suppose another motorist runs a red light and strikes a vehicle. That driver may be responsible for causing the collision. But if a defective fuel-system component allows fuel to escape and ignite in a way that substantially worsens the occupant's injuries, the investigation may also involve the vehicle or component manufacturer. Georgia recognizes these as crashworthiness or enhanced-injury cases.

The key isn't proving that the alleged defect caused the original wreck. The plaintiff must show that the defect was a substantial factor in producing injuries beyond those that probably would have resulted from the initial collision. That distinction can be critical when a person survives the impact but suffers catastrophic burns in the fire that follows.

A potential vehicle defect doesn't automatically create manufacturer liability either. A [product liability claim involving defective car parts](#) requires evidence of an actual defect and a causal connection to the enhanced injury. Engineers, fire investigators, metallurgists, fuel-system specialists, or other qualified experts may be needed depending on what failed.

Who Else May Be Liable After a Crash-Related Burn?

The responsible parties depend on the source of both the collision and the burn. A serious investigation may consider:

- **A Negligent Driver:** A motorist who causes the crash through speeding, distraction, unsafe lane changes, impaired driving, failure to yield, or other negligence may be

responsible for injuries that foreseeably result from the collision, including a resulting fire.

- **A Truck Driver and Motor Carrier:** When a commercial driver causes a wreck while working, the trucking company may be responsible under Georgia's rules governing employer liability. The company may also face separate scrutiny over maintenance, training, supervision, or other practices when the evidence supports those theories.
- **A Cargo Loader, Shipper, or Other Commercial Entity:** When hazardous cargo leaks, shifts, or is improperly handled, contracts, loading records, shipping papers, and control over the cargo can determine whether another business contributed to the exposure. Liability isn't automatic merely because a company appears somewhere in the shipping chain.
- **A Vehicle or Component Manufacturer:** A defective fuel tank, fuel line, battery component, electrical system, or other part may create an enhanced-injury claim when competent evidence shows the defect substantially worsened the burn injuries.
- **A Repair or Maintenance Company:** Recent work on a fuel, electrical, brake, or other vehicle system can become relevant if evidence shows negligent service contributed to the fire or loss of control.

That multi-party analysis is one reason a severe [truck accident claim](#) can require a different level of investigation from an ordinary two-car collision. The trucking company, cargo interests, maintenance vendors, component manufacturers, and their insurers may each control different evidence.

The Burned Vehicle May Be One of the Most Important Pieces of Evidence

In a routine crash, a damaged vehicle may be repaired, sold for salvage, or destroyed after photographs are taken. That can be a major problem when the cause of a post-impact fire is disputed.

The physical vehicle can contain evidence showing where the fire started, how fuel or chemicals moved, which components failed, whether electrical arcing occurred, and whether damage came from the original impact or the later fire. Once the vehicle has been crushed or dismantled, some of those questions may become impossible to answer.

A strong investigation may need to preserve several categories of evidence:

1. **The Vehicles and Burned Components:** Inspection before destructive testing, repairs, or salvage can help qualified experts evaluate the fire origin, fuel system, electrical components, restraint systems, and other physical evidence.
2. **Fire, Police, and EMS Records:** First responders may document flames, smoke, leaking fluid, cargo labels, rescue conditions, occupant location, and statements made before the scene changed.

3. **Photos and Video:** Dashcams, traffic cameras, business surveillance, witness phones, and first-responder images may show whether a fire started before or after impact and how quickly it spread.
4. **Commercial Truck Records:** Electronic data, maintenance files, inspection records, bills of lading, cargo documents, hazardous-material records, and dispatch information may help connect the collision and fire to a particular company or safety failure.
5. **The Medical Timeline:** Burn-center records, operative reports, TBSA estimates, wound photographs, inhalation-injury testing, graft records, rehabilitation notes, and future treatment recommendations show how the injury developed after the scene.

Preserving both the crash evidence and the medical chronology lets the case answer two separate causation questions without blurring them together.

Burn Injuries Can Change a Person's Work Long After the Wounds Close

Burn recovery can interfere with work for months, and permanent restrictions can continue much longer. A person may have trouble tolerating heat or sun exposure, wearing protective clothing, gripping tools, standing for long periods, lifting, reaching, or performing repetitive movement because of grafts, contractures, nerve damage, or hypersensitive scars.

If those limitations prevent someone from returning to the same occupation or reduce what they can earn over a career, the claim may need evidence of [lost earning capacity](#) rather than only pay stubs showing the weeks immediately missed after the wreck. A [vocational expert can evaluate how permanent restrictions affect realistic work options](#) when the career impact is disputed.

The same analysis applies to passengers. A person riding in a vehicle can suffer devastating burns even though they had no role in causing the collision, and [passenger injury claims](#) may require pursuing more than one driver or insurance policy depending on how the crash and fire occurred.

Future Burn Care Can Continue for Years

A serious burn claim shouldn't be valued only from the bills that exist when the person leaves the hospital. Future needs can include scar management, compression garments, occupational or physical therapy, reconstructive surgery, graft revision, laser or other scar treatment, pain care, counseling, treatment for contractures, and ongoing specialist follow-up.

The most severe injuries can also create home-care or adaptive needs. When doctors expect substantial long-term treatment or assistance, a [life care planner can organize future medical and support needs](#) around the actual prognosis and anticipated costs.

Those future projections need to stay grounded in the treating specialists' recommendations. Not every burn survivor will need another surgery, and not every scar will become a disabling contracture. A credible damages claim distinguishes what is possible from what the medical evidence says is reasonably expected.

What Compensation May Be Available After a Georgia Vehicle Burn Injury?

A burn injury claim can include the same broad categories of damages available after other serious Georgia vehicle accidents, but burns can make several of those categories unusually significant.

- **Medical Treatment and Future Care:** Emergency treatment, burn-center hospitalization, respiratory care, surgery, skin grafts, wound care, therapy, medications, reconstructive procedures, scar management, and medically supported future treatment.
- **Lost Income and Earning Capacity:** Time away from work during acute treatment and rehabilitation, plus future income loss when permanent restrictions change the person's occupation or career path.
- **Physical Pain and Functional Loss:** Burn pain, dressing changes, graft donor-site pain, itching, hypersensitivity, restricted movement, sleep disruption, and limitations in daily activity.
- **Scarring and Disfigurement:** Visible scars, skin-color and texture changes, hair loss, facial changes, and other permanent alterations to appearance.
- **Emotional and Psychological Harm:** Fear associated with being trapped in a burning vehicle, anxiety, depression, trauma symptoms, altered self-image, and distress connected to permanent scars or disfigurement.
- **Wrongful Death Damages:** When burns, inhalation injury, or other crash trauma is fatal, the surviving family and estate may have claims under Georgia wrongful-death law.

For someone facing permanent burns, disfigurement, respiratory injury, or loss of function, the case may fall within the type of [serious injury claim](#) where the future consequences matter as much as the immediate hospitalization.

Our Georgia Personal Injury Lawyers Can Investigate the Crash and the Fire

Burn cases demand more than proving that two vehicles collided. The evidence may have to explain why a fire started, why a fuel or chemical release occurred, whether a vehicle defect enhanced the injury, how long the victim was exposed, and what the medical future will look like after the wounds close.

Our attorneys can preserve the vehicles and electronic evidence, obtain commercial-truck and cargo records, work with fire and engineering experts when needed, gather burn-center and rehabilitation records, document scarring and functional loss, and identify every party whose conduct may have contributed to the injury.

If you or someone you love suffered serious burns in a Georgia accident, [contact Gary Martin Hays & Associates](#) for a free consultation. We can investigate both the collision and the events that caused or worsened the burn injuries and help you understand what evidence may be needed to protect your claim.