

Sodium Quenching Fire

A Kansas State University chemist suffered second-degree burns in a chemical flash fire early today in a third-floor laboratory in K-State's Chemistry/Biochemistry Building.

Ranjit Koodali, 35, a postdoctoral fellow at K-State, was taken by ambulance to Manhattan's Mercy Regional Health Center on College Avenue and then air-lifted to the University of Kansas Medical Center in Kansas City, Kan., school officials said.

According to Steven Galitzer, director of environmental health and safety for K-State's Division of Public Safety, Koodali was cleaning an air fumehood about 8:40 a.m. when the fire started. The cleaning procedure involves removing a reaction vessel filled with solvent and sodium for treatment, which then must be poured slowly into an isopropanol bath to remove the sodium.

"Either too much was poured in or the procedure was done too fast," Galitzer said. "The result was a flash fire and Dr. Koodali's clothing caught on fire and he was burned."

Shalini Rodrigues, a postdoctoral fellow, and Johanna Haggstrom, a graduate student, were in a neighboring lab and heard Koodali's calls for help. They quickly threw a fire blanket on him and extinguished the blaze, Galitzer said. No other injuries were reported and damage to the lab was minimal. Galitzer said Koodali's appeared to have suffered burns on one of his arms and his chest.

The Manhattan Fire Department and K-State police department also responded to the fire. Koodali joined K-State in May.