

Australian/New Zealand Standard™

**Microwavable heat packs—Wheat and
other organic filling materials**



AS/NZS 5116:2016

This Joint Australian/New Zealand Standard was prepared by Joint Technical Committee CS-113, Microwavable Heat Packs. It was approved on behalf of the Council of Standards Australia on 10 May 2016 and by the New Zealand Standards Approval Board on 2 June 2016.

This Standard was published on 8 June 2016.

The following are represented on Committee CS-113:

Agency for Clinical Innovation Burn Injury Network (Statewide Burn Injury Service)
Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council
Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
CHOICE
Consumers' Federation of Australia
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This Standard was issued in draft form for comment as DR AS/NZS 5116:2015.

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First published as AS/NZS 5116:2016.

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Jointly published by SAI Global Limited under licence from Standards Australia Limited, GPO Box 476, Sydney, NSW 2001 and by Standards New Zealand, PO Box 10729, Wellington 6011.

ISBN 978 1 76035 503 6

PREFACE

This Standard was prepared by the Joint Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand Committee CS-113, Microwavable Heat Packs.

The objectives of this Standard include:

- (a) To provide suppliers and manufacturers of microwavable heat packs containing organic material such as wheat, or lavender, (but not limited to these) with requirements and test methods that will ensure these products perform in a predictable manner and that users are appropriately informed of their dangers.
- (b) To provide the user with safety warnings and instructions for use and maintenance of microwavable heat packs containing organic material to mitigate the risk of fire, smoke inhalation and contact burns leading to accidental death and injury associated with the improper use of these products. This Standard applies to microwavable heat packs in the form of heat packs, bags, pillows, children's products, items appealing to a child, or having play value, wearable products, and products of the like which contain organic materials including but not limited to wheat, rice, legumes, pulses, dried flowers, herbs, or other grains.
- (c) To reduce the level of accidental injury, death and property loss (and the associated social and economic costs to the community) arising from the design and improper use of microwavable heat packs.

Microwavable heat packs that meet this Standard should provide the user with sufficient information to assure they can use these products confidently and safely.

Compliance with the provisions of this Standard does not override failure to comply with the provisions of the Essential Principles of the Therapeutic Goods (Medical Devices) Regulations 2002 and the *Therapeutic Goods Act 1989*, or with other applicable Australian (federal, state or territory) or New Zealand laws and regulations.

The term 'normative' has been used in this Standard to define the application of the appendix to which it applies. A 'normative' appendix is an integral part of a Standard.

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FOREWORD

Internationally, microwavable heat packs (MHP), typically those in the form of ‘wheat packs’ or ‘wheat bags’ have long been associated with fires which have resulted in fatalities, burns and property loss. The development of this Standard was prompted by the New South Wales Coroner’s recommendation arising from an inquest into one such death. Evidence garnered from firefighting services locally and internationally indicates the use of MHPs have been associated with both domestic fires and fires in aged care facilities.

MHPs are often perceived as being eco-friendly, safe and an inexpensive alternative to hot water bottles and they may be designed to look like toys to appeal to children. Their popularity has increased over time as they can be easily and cheaply made at home with few materials which are readily available in supermarkets and general stores, or purchased from a variety of retail outlets, at craft markets and online.

Issues arise because many people are generally uninformed about how to use these products safely. MHPs may not provide appropriate warnings and instructions and people may not appreciate these products may catch fire or smoulder when overheated, and can quickly generate life threatening levels of smoke. The injury data indicates injuries sustained from the improper use of MHPs relate mainly to smoke inhalation and contact burn injuries, particularly in the elderly, and in some cases children required medical treatment.

Existing Standards do not fully address the issues of the dangers arising from overheating wheat bags, using them in place of hot water bottles and electric blankets to warm beds, the potential choking and inhalation hazards posed by the fillings when liberated and the risk of contact burns when used by people with reduced feeling in their skin, such as diabetics, and those with thinner or delicate skins as in the elderly, infants and children.