



Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service

Protecting Our Community

COMMUNITY INFORMATION BULLETIN NO. 18

TAKE CARE WITH OXYGEN

The following advice has been issued by Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service to inform the community of the increased risk of fire and explosion in the home where oxygen therapy equipment has been prescribed to assist people with breathing difficulties.

Oxygen is colourless, odourless and tasteless and when used correctly it is safe and effective. However, if used incorrectly the consequences are significant which can prove fatal. The air we breathe normally contains 21% oxygen but even a small increase in the concentration of oxygen in the air to 24% produces a potentially dangerous environment. It becomes easier to start a fire, which will then burn hotter and more fiercely than in normal air. Many materials will burn more vigorously in an oxygen enriched atmosphere.

An oxygen enriched atmosphere is often the result of:

- leaks from damaged or poorly maintained hoses, pipes or valves;
- leaks from poor connections;
- opening valves accidentally or deliberately;
- not closing valves properly;
- poor ventilation where oxygen is being used; or
- misuse, ie, cooling or refreshing the air in confined spaces.

You can reduce the risk of having a fire significantly by following these safety tips:

- Follow the guidance from your oxygen supplier.
- Never smoke a cigarette or use an electronic cigarette whilst on oxygen therapy or close to a patient using oxygen equipment.
- Never charge electronic cigarettes or similar electronic devices around oxygen therapy equipment.
- Do not store or use oxygen equipment near sources of heat; it is recommended that oxygen should be kept at a minimum of 3 metres from any open flame, including gas and electric cookers.
- Do not use flammable products, such as cleaning fluid, paint thinners or petroleum based creams or aerosols on or near oxygen equipment.
- Turn off oxygen equipment when not in use.
- Ensure oxygen equipment is kept clean and well maintained. Report any faults immediately.
- Store oxygen in a dry, well ventilated area.

Be aware of the dangers associated with the use of oxygen. If you have any concerns, please call your supplier. **NEVER** attempt to repair any fault or modify your oxygen equipment.

Remember, if a fire starts, get everyone out of the property and close all doors behind you. Dial 999 and ask for the Fire & Rescue Service.

For further information phone 028 9266 4221. www.nifrs.org



#STOPfire