Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

caring supporting improving together

Improving and Safeguarding Social Wellbeing

Fire Risk Awareness Resources

for Social Work and Social Care

Ulster University

Safer Together

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service

Safer Together Concept

Safer Together Concept

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service have a People at Risk Strategy which aims to reduce fire risk among those aged 50 and over. Recent studies at Ulster University have identified that those working with older people could be useful in reducing fire risk in the homes they visit in the community[1].

The Safer Together concept has evolved from collaboration with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) and Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) over a three-year period. A partnership agreement between the two organisations formally set out the intention to work together to make their service users safer in their own homes. Following incidents in the Belfast area, Senior Social Work Practitioner Connor Breen (BHSCT) and Station Commander Michael Roberts (NIFRS) worked together to set referral pathways in place to link both agencies. Fire safety training was delivered to social workers in the community and firefighters were informed about the work of Older Peoples' Services and received Dementia Awareness training. The team also organised Older Peoples' Day at Central Fire Station in Belfast and over one hundred older service users were invited to have a day of fun activities and also receive some vital fire safety information. Since 2014, research at Ulster University has been carried out by Peter Cassidy who is also a Crew Commander in Prevention & Protection at NIFRS. The aim of the research is to design and evaluate educational resources to reduce fire risk among older people in Northern Ireland.

The Safer Together Project combines the activities at Ulster University with the work being carried out at the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service to create a bespoke package of resources to increase the fire safety awareness of social workers and service users. The development of the resources has involved social workers and service users throughout to meet the needs of those working and living in the community. Thanks to funding from the Social Work Strategy this project has been brought to life in the form of educational videos, risk aide memoirs, leaflets and safety devices all aimed at assisting and supporting social workers and service users to reduce fire risk in the community.

This booklet is part of the larger body of resources that have been designed to educate and inform social workers about fire risks in the community. As well as describing what risks to look out for, this booklet outlines what to do if risks are observed and what support is available in the community to help reduce fire risk.

1. Cassidy, P, McConnell, N, Boyce, K. The older adult: Associated fire risks and current challenges for the development of future fire safety intervention strategies. Fire and Materials. 2020; 1- 11. Accessed Online; available at https://doi.org/10.1002/fam.2823

Case Study-
Safer Together in Action

A Service User, called Michael*, who was 84 years old, had an early onset dementia diagnosis and still had capacity. Michael's family were concerned about fire risk, particularly regarding smoking materials, and brought it to the attention of his social worker.

The social worker arranged a Home Fire Safety Check with Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service. A joint visit was carried out with the fire crew, Michael and family members and they worked together to make Michael's home safer.

The fire crews gave advice on how fire risk can be reduced and how Michael could escape if a fire were to start. As there were no smoke alarms present at the time of the visit, the fire crews installed two alarms and showed Michael and his family how they work.

Not long after the Home Fire Safety Check, Michael's smoking materials started a small fire in the kitchen and the smoke alarm sounded alerting Michael who was able to escape uninjured and called family members for advice.

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service were alerted immediately and responded to the incident. The small fire was dealt with and only caused minor damage as the smoke alarms that were installed gave an early warning. The social worker, the family and the fire service worked with Michael to prevent a similar incident in the future.

***Anonymised**

Smoking

Having a smoke-free home will provide a safer and healthier living environment for service users. Smoking is one of the leading causes of accidental fires in the home and the top cause of preventable illness and death. Stopping smoking will reduce the risk of developing many related illnesses such as cancers, heart disease, bronchitis and emphysema (COPD). If service users smoke, you can help them take extra care to stay safe.

Follow this advice to keep service users safe from fire:

Where possible, encourage service users to smoke outside; this will significantly reduce the likelihood of a fire starting in their home.

It is vitally important that service users never smoke in bed, particularly if they have been drinking alcohol or have taken medication that could make them drowsy. If service users have the capacity to make their own decisions and choose to smoke in bed, try to make the bedding as safe as possible by suggesting fire retardant bedding; the Safer Together Project can supply a limited number of bedding packs in the BHSCT area. Information on how to access bedding packs is detailed in the resources section of this booklet.

If service users have mobility issues and smoke, they are at greater risk from fire. Often clothes or bedding are the first items to ignite which leaves them in a particularly vulnerable position. Consider suggesting a smoking apron, or another fire-resistant covering, to service users to prevent clothes igniting.

Encourage service users to stub cigarettes out properly; recommend they use a deep sturdy ashtray and suggest they do not let it overfill.

Putting water on cigarette butts is a good idea; recommend the contents of an ashtray are cold before they are emptied into a suitable waste bin outside the service users' home.

Follow this guidance to help reduce the risk to older people, those with impaired mobility, including being confined to a bed/chair, or who have other health issues:

Assess the risk to each person by looking for danger signs such as burns or scorch marks and, if identified, implement control measures.

Encourage smokers to wear a smoking apron or cover their lap with a fire-retardant cover.

Some clothing materials, particularly if loose fitting such as nylon, will ignite much more easily than others, such as cotton or wool; eliminate flammable clothing where possible.

Avoid smoking in bed; if not practical, consider flame retardant night wear and bedding.

Smoking on an airflow mattress should be avoided; use fire-resistant bedding and replace the mattress if this is not possible.

Never smoke near to, or whilst using oxygen therapy equipment; increased oxygen can cause materials to ignite very easily and then burn much faster and hotter.

If patients are being treated with paraffin-based skin emollients that are covered by a dressing or clothing, there is a danger that smoking or using a naked flame could cause dressings or clothing to ignite. Emollients soak into fabric and can become a fire hazard. Advise patients not to smoke or be near any naked flame and ensure that clothing and bedding is changed regularly, preferably daily.

Case Study - Nursing Home Fire

A fatal fire which occurred in a nursing home in England in 2012 was caused by smoking.

The incident involved an elderly resident of the nursing home who was smoking in the garden. She had refused to change from her night attire, had a blanket over her legs and had asked a care worker to fetch her a drink. While the care worker was away, she attempted to light a cigarette with a match which she dropped into her lap. The match caused a fire resulting in severe burns. Despite initial treatment from paramedics and subsequently at Hospital, she died later that evening. At the Coroner's inquest it was evidenced that if a fire protective apron or smock could have been provided to be worn or draped over the smoker, such an incident would have been avoided. The match or lit cigarette would have burnt out without damage to the clothing or person.

Accessed online available at https://www.essex-fire.gov.uk/_img/pics/pdf_1401806682.pdf

Electricity

Fires in the home can be caused by faulty electrical appliances, plugs and cables but many occur due to mistakes from homeowners. It is important to be aware of the common causes of fires which involve electricity and the particular danger signs you should look out for around your home.

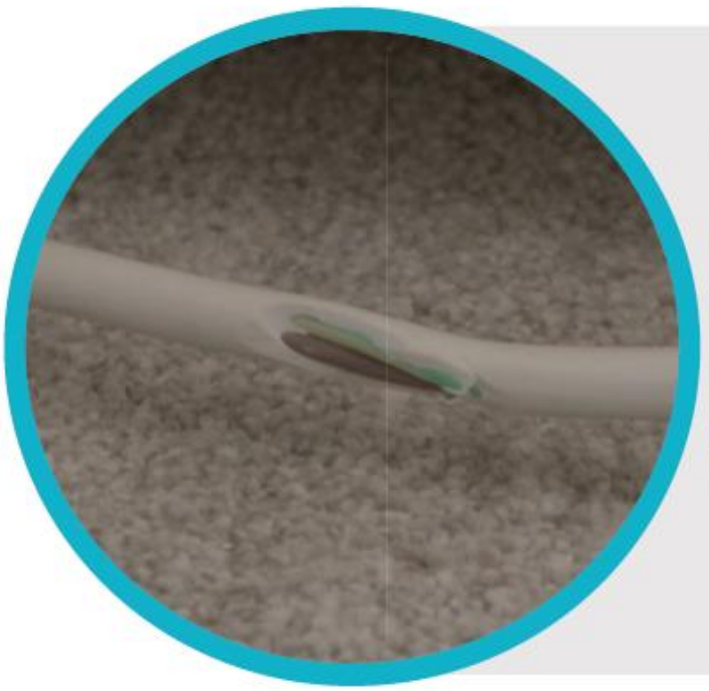
LOOK OUT FOR OVERLOADED SOCKETS

Check the current rating of the extension lead before plugging appliances into it. Most are rated at 13 A, but some are rated at only 10 A or less - the rating should be clearly marked on the back or underside of the extension lead. If not, refer to the manufacturer's instructions.

Never overload an extension lead by plugging in appliances that together will exceed the maximum current rating stated for the extension lead. This could cause the plug in the wall socket to overheat and possibly cause a fire.

Use the overload calculator from Electrical Safety First to check if you're exceeding the maximum load. Click the link below to go straight to the calculator.

https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/guidance/safety-around-the-home/overloading-sockets/



- Make sure the outer covering of all power leads are not frayed or damaged; replace if necessary.
- Badly positioned electrical appliances can make cables trip hazards.
- Never place cables under rugs or carpets where damaged or worn parts will not be noticed.

LOOK OUT FOR SCORCHING OF PLUGS OR SOCKETS

Hot plugs or sockets, scorch marks, fuses that often blow, or flickering lights are often a sign of loose wiring or other electrical problems.

Plugs and sockets should not be damaged, display burn marks, make crackling noises or give out excessive heat. A registered electrician is recommended to carry out an Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR)

For a detailed guide to electrical safety click on the link below:

https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/media/2169/electrical-safety-for-older-people.pdf

Cooking

- **Remind service users to avoid leaving cooking unattended;**
- **Remind service users to turn the cooker off and take the saucepans off the heat when leaving the kitchen.**
- **Encourage service users not to cook if they are tired, have been drinking alcohol or have taken medication that could make them drowsy;**

Encourage service users to keep flammable items such as oven mitts, tea towels and cables away from the cooker top;

- Remind service users to be careful and avoid leaning over cooker tops as loose clothing and aprons can catch fire;
- Recommend the oven and grill pan are kept free from a build-up of oils and grease; this could ignite and cause a fire;
- A barbeque should never be used indoors; burning or smouldering fuel can cause carbon monoxide poisoning;
- Encourage service users to make sure the cooker or hob is turned off when they have finished cooking.

Deep fat frying

It is much safer to use an electronically controlled deep fat fryer than a chip pan. The built-in thermostat controls the temperature and prevents the oil overheating. If service users continue to use a chip pan, and have capacity, encourage them to follow this safety advice to prevent a fire starting:

- **Take care when cooking with hot oil; it can easily overheat and catch fire;**
- **Never fill the chip pan more than one third full of fat or oil;**
- **Make sure any food is dry before putting into hot oil;**
- **If the oil starts to smoke, it's too hot; turn off the heat and leave to cool;**
- **Do not attempt to move a chip pan that is on fire or is smoking; and**
- **Remember, never throw water on an oil fire as it could create a fireball.**

Candles

Candles have become significantly more popular around the home; whether for festive reasons, relaxation purposes or simply to create a pleasing scent, their use and the potential fire hazards that candles can pose, should never be understated. Over recent years Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service has seen an increase in the number of candle related incidents that it has attended.

It is vitally important to remember that a candle is an open flame in the home which will ignite any combustible material that it comes into contact with. Reminding service users of the fire safety advice below will help to keep them safe from fire:

• Always keep a burning candle within sight. Extinguish all candles when leaving a room or before going to sleep; be sure the wick ember is no longer glowing.

• Never burn a candle on or near anything that can catch fire; keep burning candles away from furniture, curtains, bedding, carpets, books, paper, flammable decorations, etc.

• Keep burning candles out of the reach of children and pets.

• Trim candlewicks to¼ inch each time before burning; long or crooked wicks can cause uneven burning and drip ping.

• Always use a candle-holder specifically designed for candle use; the holder should be heat resistant, sturdy, and large enough to contain any drips or melted wax.

• Be sure the candle-holder is placed on a stable, heat-resistant surface; this can help prevent heat damage to underlying surfaces and prevent glass containers from breaking.

• Encourage service users to always read and follow the manufacturer's use and safety instructions carefully. A candle should not bun for longer than the manufacturer recommends.

• Burning candles should be kept away from drafts, vents, ceiling fans and air currents; this will help prevent rapid, uneven burning and avoid flame flare-ups and sooting. Drafts can also blow nearby lightweight items into the flame where they could catch fire.

• A candle should not be allowed to burn all the way down. The flame should be extinguished if it comes too close to the holder or container. For a margin of safety, discontinue burning a candle when 2 inches of wax remains or½ inch if in a container.

• Burning candles should be at least three inches apart from one another; this helps ensure they don't melt one another or create their own drafts to cause improper burning.

• The safest way to prevent hot wax spatters while extinguishing a candle is to use a snuffer.

• Never extinguish candles with water; the water can cause the hot wax to spatter and might cause a glass container to break.

• Be very careful if using candles during a power outage. Flashlights and other battery-powered lights are safer sources of light during a power failure. The safer together project has a limited number of emergency torches available for service users within BHSCT, further information on how to access them is provided in the resources section of this booklet.

• Extinguish a candle if it repeatedly smokes, flickers, or the flame becomes too high as these indicate it is not burning properly. Cool, trim the wick, then check for drafts before relighting.

• Never use a candle as a night light.

Tea lights

It is also very important to stress the dangers associated with the use of tea lights. Tea light candles can reach extremely high temperatures and the foil container becomes extremely hot.

• Always burn tea lights in or on a suitable, non-flammable holder on a heat resistant surface.

• Never place tea lights directly onto plastic surfaces such as TVs, computers or baths.

• Never leave a tea light unattended and remember to extinguish before going to sleep.

Case Study

A service user called John* had an early onset dementia diagnosis and had capacity. As part of his religion, John lit a candle on a weekly basis which was a concern for his social worker. The social worker discussed the concerns with John, and it was agreed that a referral can be made to NIFRS for a HFSC. A fire officer suggested a battery alternative is offered to John as a safer option.

A battery candle was accepted by John and he continues to practice his faith without the fire risk.

*Anonomised

Fires and Heaters

Many people will turn on portable heaters or light open fires to supplement heat during the colder months. However, it is vital that the dangers associated with portable heaters are understood. Investigations by Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service have unfortunately recorded instances where people are putting themselves at serious risk from fire by using portable heaters and open fires in an unsafe manner.

By following this simple guidance, people can stay safe while using electric heaters:

- Always follow the manufacturer's operating and maintenance instructions;
- Never leave portable heaters unattended;
- Turn off portable heaters whilst sleeping;
- Do not sit or stand too close to heaters; clothing may melt or even ignite;
- Do not dry clothes on portable heaters;
- Ensure there is at least one metre distance from any combustible material such as furniture, bedding or curtains;
- Do not place portable heaters where they could be knocked over easily; and
- Do not use flammable adhesives, cleaning fluids or aerosol sprays near a heater.
- Buy a heater that carries the British Safety Mark approval;
- Keep flexes as short as possible and position so that they will not cause a trip hazard;
- Check flex for wear or damage, and fit the correct fuse; and
- Unplug when not in use.

Portable Gas Heaters

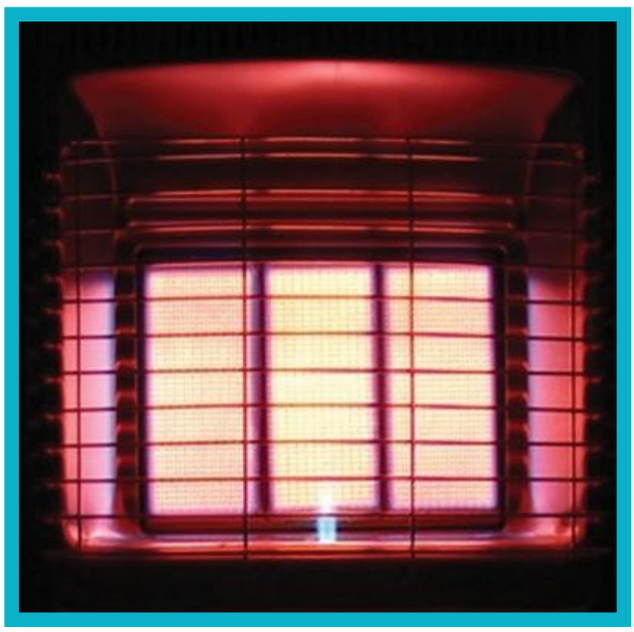
• If a service user relies on a portable gas heater, ensure good ventilation in the room where the heater is to be used;

• Check the heater is approved by British and European Safety Standards;

• Recommend cylinders are changed in the open air if possible;

• If you suspect a gas leak then do not use the heater; remove it to a safe location outside the building; and

• Ensure the heater is serviced regularly by a qualified Gas Safe engineer.



Log Burners & Open Fires

Safety tips for log burners and open fires

- Keep chimneys and flues clean and well maintained.
- Always have your chimney swept by a specialist - at least once a year for coal, twice if burning logs.
- Make sure you use a fireguard to protect against flying sparks and hot embers.
- Before you go to bed, make sure fires or hot embers are under control and guarded.
- Store logs away from solid fuel burners - radiated heat can cause them to burn.
- Keep clothing and fabric well away from open fires and log burners.
- Watch out for children and pets - supervise them carefully and use fire guards.
- Look for a Carbon Monoxide alarm if a service user has an open fire or log burner.

Emollient Creams

Emollient creams are vitally important to people who suffer from chronic skin conditions, such as eczema or psoriasis. They are moisturisers that may contain paraffin or other products like shea or cocoa butter, nut oil, or mineral oils and they work by covering the skin with a protective film or barrier which keeps the moisture in. We encourage their use as recommended by medical professionals and the manufacturer's instructions.

Emollient creams are not flammable in isolation but regular use of these products, which may or may not contain paraffin, over a number of days, can lead to them soaking into your clothing, bedding and bandages/dressings. This residue then dries within the fabric and can cause a fire to develop, burn intensely and spread rapidly if an ignition or heat source is introduced.

If you use, or you care for someone who needs emollient creams, lotions or gels, you can help keep them safe by understanding and reducing the related fire risks.

- Never smoke in bed
- Do not smoke if there is any chance your clothing or dressings could be contaminated with these products
- Do not cook with gas or electric hobs, if there is any chance your clothing or dressings could be contaminated
- Do not sit too close to any open fires, gas fires or halogen heaters
- Wash your clothing and bedding daily at the highest temperature recommended by the fabric care instructions.

This should reduce some of the contamination but will not remove it.

If you are near someone whose clothing catches fire, you can also use a blanket or a rug to smother the flames. Cool any burns with running water and seek medical attention immediately.

Case Study- Emollient Creams

Watch Manager Chris Bell from West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service and National Fire Chiefs Council's lead for emollient creams, said:

"There have now been in excess of 50 deaths in the UK where the build-up of emollients on bedding, dressings or clothing may have contributed to the speed and intensity of the fire. Many of these fires were caused by people who smoked and were unaware of the fire risks associated with emollient build-up on fabrics.

"We have been trying to raise awareness about this issue with the public and health and care professionals. Ensuring that these products carry warnings will certainly help us as we continue to work with pharmacists, the NHS and care sector to prevent any future deaths."

West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service, accessed online, available at https://www.westyorksfire.gov.uk/news/research-shows-hidden-fire-risk- of-emollients/

Smoke Alarms

A smoke alarm is a warning device that detects smoke at the earliest stages of a fire; this gives occupants vital extra time to escape. Smoke alarms are low cost items; you can get them from supermarkets or high street stores. If service users are buying a smoke alarm, suggest one with a 10-year battery.

Service users should have a minimum of one smoke alarm on every level of their home. A minimum of one smoke alarm on each level of the property is recommended however, if you are visiting someone who is vulnerable it is worth considering more smoke alarms depending on their circumstances. Obviously the more you install, the better cover you will have.

Case Study – Smoke Alarm Installation

Coroner warns social workers: check service users have smoke alarms:

Social workers have been warned to check smoke alarms for high-risk service users after a man receiving support from Hackney council died in a house fire.

The man died of smoke inhalation in November 2014 when his bedding caught alight from a discarded cigarette. He lived in supported housing and while smoke alarms were installed in his hall and kitchen, there was no smoke detection system in his bedroom.

Coroner Hassell said Mr Thompson's social workers "never addressed their minds to the question of whether there was a smoke detector in his room and, if not, whether that might be useful", despite him being at high risk of fire due to his smoking, drinking and immobility.

Hassell added that this issue would "benefit from exploration" for high-risk service users.

Available at: https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2016/08/11/coroner-warns-social-workers-check-smoke-alarms-service-users/

S	SMOKE ALARM
T	TEST ALARMS WEEKLY
O	OBVIOUS DANGERS
P	PLAN YOUR ESCAPE

Northern Ireland
Fire & Rescue Service

nifrs.org

Protecting Our Community

Home Safety Week

INSTALL SMOKE DETECTORS IN THE RIGHT PLACES

Nuisance alarms can be caused by the incorrect positioning of smoke detectors. To reduce the chances of false alarms in your home follow our guide to where to install your alarms. For the earliest warning in the event of a fire, make sure you have enough alarms in your home. A fire is more likely to happen in a room that is used frequently. Ensure these rooms have smoke detectors fitted.

- Smoke alarms must be replaced every ten years.
- Install interlinked alarms so they can be heard throughout the home.
- Do not install smoke detectors in rooms that contain airbourne particles like car exhaust fumes or steam. These can trigger a false alarm.
- Test your smoke alarm on a regular basis, only working smoke alarms save lives

NFCC
National Fire Chiefs Council

Types of alarm

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service recommend testing smoke alarms once a week. The alarm is tested by pressing the test button. While visiting older service users you could suggest a family member, friend or neighbour to help test the alarm on a regular basis if required.

There are many different smoke alarms on the market which can sometimes be confusing however, it can be simplified by categorising the alarm by their power source. There are battery alarms and hard-wired alarms.

Battery Alarm
Independent alarm with a removable or built in battery

Hard Wired Alarm
Connected to the electricity supply

View here for a video explaining different types of smoke alarms.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiViNyfaTkc

Battery Alarms

Battery alarms are the cheapest option and can be easily installed. There are different types of battery alarm; some devices have a replaceable battery and others have a built-in battery which usually lasts for ten years.

Replaceable Battery Alarm

Independent alarm with a removable battery that should be replaced annually

Ten Year Battery Alarm

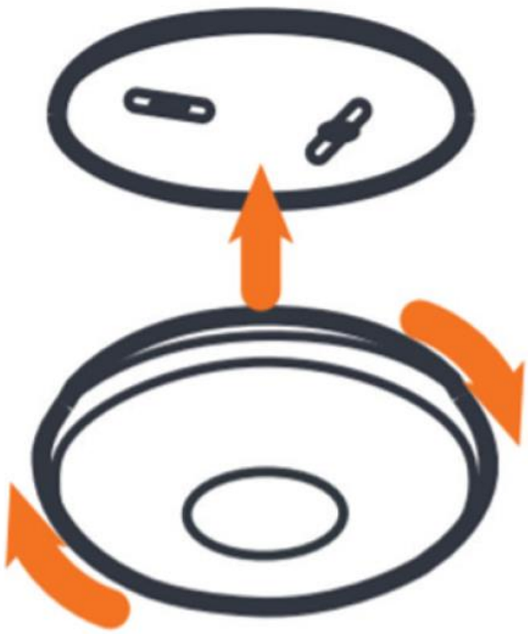
Sealed battery unit

There are two methods of installing battery alarms;

Some battery alarms come in two parts; the base plate and the detector unit.

The base plate is attached to the ceiling

The alarm is rotated clockwise as far as it can go to secure it to the base plate.



Other battery alarms come as one single unit. The front of these alarms can be opened to allow access to the backplate. Screws can then be inserted in the holes provided to attach the device to the ceiling.

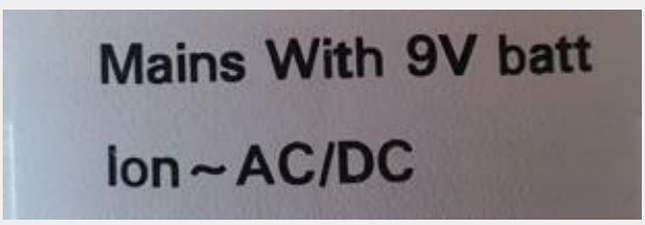
These alarms usually have a replaceable battery and once installed the front can be opened to replace the battery.

View here for a video showing how smoke alarm batteries can be replaced:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1_FAYgHhrE

Hard Wired Alarms

Hard wired alarms, when installed, look exactly like battery alarms however, there is an electrical cable supplying power to the alarm.

Normally, hard wired alarms can be identified by labels on the outer casing; the alarm shown here has two warnings which are shown below.



Hard wired alarms usually have a battery back-up. The alarm will chirp when the battery needs replaced.

The alarm can be disconnected from the power supply by removing the three-pin plug from the unit; be sure to isolate the mains supply before carrying this out.

When the door is lifted, the battery can then be removed.

The battery is beneath the door as shown here

Video showing this process: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Uc5x0-S2rw

Sensory Support

Specialist smoke alarms should be considered for service users with hearing loss. The Sensory Support Team at the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust can carry out an assessment for the provision of specialist equipment depending on the needs and circumstances of the service user.

The Programme has an open referral system in place and will accept referrals from

Service users
Family Members or Carers
GPs and other Healthcare professionals
Voluntary organisations

Referrals can be made directly to the team Tel: (028) 9504 0200 or via the Call Management Centre Tel: (028) 9056 5565 Monday- Friday 9am-5pm.

Further information can be found at:
https://belfasttrust.hscni.net/service/sensory-support/

Assistive Technology

Where it is decided that assistive technology is used to support service users to live independently, a smoke detector linked to the system should be considered in all cases where a Community Alarm is being installed. This is particularly relevant for people with complex needs, who have limited mobility and smoke.

Telecare Home Smart Hub & Personal Pendant are a discreet, quick and reliable way of getting 24/7 help at the touch of a button if the service user has an accident or emergency in their home. The service gives users the freedom to live independently in their own home but with the knowledge that they have instant help if needed. A wireless optical smoke alarm for the home with two alarms can be installed - one is an audible alarm that sounds within the property and the second alarm signal is automatically sent to Radius Connect 24, 24-hour monitoring centre - offering peace of mind and support.

When smoke or fire is detected an alert will automatically be sounded in the home. The 24/7 monitoring centre will also be notified and contact the emergency services if needed. The call operator will stay on the line until help arrives providing reassurance and support.

Case Study-
Assistive Technology

Mr Allan* lives by himself in a privately owned house. He came to the attention of social services when he accidentally set his paper bin on fire and was referred for an assessment. Mr Allan did not need Care at Home and assessors recommended a Community Alarm and Pendant to enable Mr Allan to contact assistance should he have a fall. Telecare smoke detectors were also fitted in his home. This equipment is allowing Mr Allan to live independently with the risk of accidents reduced.

***anonymised**

Accessed online, available at
https://www.fifehealthandsocialcare.org/telecare/

Dementia

Each person with dementia is different, and every home situation varies, therefore it is important to have a person-centred approach to fire safety. When considering the fire safety needs of someone with dementia, it is important to find the right balance between independence and interventions. The person with dementia should be involved in decision making and their consent sought and given, where possible. Where this is not possible, it is vital that those making the decision have the person's best interests at heart.

A joint Home Fire Safety Check with Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service can help identify and manage fire risks and this can be reviewed if required. The case study below is provided by the National Fire Chiefs Council and is available at:
https://www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/Case-study

Airflow Mattresses

Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service (GMFRS) have been investigating the fire risk associated with airflow mattresses and their guidance is detailed below.

Dynamic Air Flow Pressure Relieving Mattresses (and overlays placed on top of standard mattresses) are provided for prevention and treatment of pressure ulcers (bedsores) to people who spend extended periods of time in bed, or are bedbound, due to illness and impaired mobility. The mattresses/overlays are often used in hospitals or in-patient settings but are also provided in the home environment including care homes. The mattresses/overlays are filled with air by a pump. These systems use dynamic, controlled air pressure cells to constantly adjust the mattress/overlay in response to the patient's needs. For the purpose of this document the term mattress will also encompass overlays.

What is the problem in relation to fire?

There have been five fire incidents in Greater Manchester relating to the use of Dynamic Air Flow Pressure Relieving Mattresses in the domestic (home) environment over the last 4 years. Four of these were fatal incidents. GMFRS is aware of two further incidents in other areas, one of which was fatal.

In five of the seven incidents the ignition source was identified as smoking materials, as a result of individuals smoking in bed. The remaining two incidents were caused by a hot hairdryer placed on the bed, and by a television which caught fire resulting in melted plastic falling onto the bed. In all incident s, it is believed that the air released, when the mattress was punctured by the ignition source, propagated the fire causing it to spread more quickly and intensely. It should be noted that when one of these mattresses is punctured and loses air, the pump reacts by working harder to replace the air and so more air is released, fuelling the fire even further. In addition, the mattress pump contains a battery back-up so that if the electricity supply fails, the pump continues.

1. Include Fire Safety within Assessments

If your organisation is involved in the assessment of individuals or provision of Dynamic Air Flow Pressure Relieving Mattresses, it is recommended that fire safety is considered within assessments and management of risk.

Consideration needs to be given to an individual's environment and behaviours. The differences between a sterile environment such as a hospital and the home environment should be taken into account. Wherever possible, actions should be taken to mitigate any risks that are identified as a result of these differences. The information below in points 2-6 provides guidance to assist

2. Provide Fire Retardant Bedding

GMFRS recommends that fire retardant bedding should be used to reduce fire risk associated with Dynamic Air Flow Pressure Relieving Mattresses. It is recommended that organisations prescribing and providing Dynamic Air Flow Pressure Relieving Mattresses work together to ensure that this is in place. Consideration needs to be given to the amount of bedding provided to account for change of bedding.

If there is a smoking risk the air flow mattress should be replaced.

3. Make a referral to NIFRS for a Home Safety Check

NIFRS delivers Home Fire Safety Checks (HFSC) to individuals within the home environment. During a HFSC, NIFRS staff identify risk specific to a household and provide advice and interventions to reduce risk and improve fire safety awareness. In some cases, including where a person is at increased risk of fire, free smoke detection is fitted.

In all cases professionals working with individuals using Dynamic Air Flow Pressure Relieving Mattresses should seek consent to refer to NIFRS for a HFSC. If consent cannot be sought or is not given professionals should deliver the fire safety advice below and contact NIFRS for further guidance.

Hoarding

Hoarding is a condition where a person has a persistent difficulty discarding personal possessions. The large amount of possessions fills the home and prevents normal use of space. Living space becomes cluttered and may be unusable.

Hoarding can increase the risk of a fire occurring and makes it more difficult for people living within the property to evacuate safely. Fire can also spread to neighbouring properties if the level of hoarding is severe or if flammable items such as gas containers are being stored. It also poses a high risk to firefighters and other first responders if attending the property.

If you do store large amounts of possessions in and around the home, you can help keep yourself safe by following this advice:

- Make it a priority to keep the area around the cooker clear.
- Do not place combustible items close to heaters, lamps or other electrical equipment.
- If you smoke, use a proper ashtray and place it on a flat, stable surface; empty the ashtray regularly and never leave cigarettes unattended.
- If you use candles or tea lights, ensure they are in a heat resistant holder on a flat, stable surface; never burn a candle on or near anything that can catch fire; keep candles away from furniture, curtains, bedding, carpets, books and paper, etc.
- Do not store gas cylinders in your home as they are a serious hazard during a fire.
- Do not stack items to a height that they become unstable.
- Ensure all internal doors can be closed, particularly before going to bed at night.
- Make sure you have a working smoke alarm and test it weekly.
- Plan and practice how to escape from your home if there is a fire.
- In the event of a fire, do not attempt to put it out yourself - leave your home immediately and call the Fire & Rescue Service once you are safely outside. Never go back inside once you have escaped.

If you think that a family member or someone you know may need some help or assistance with hoarding, try and persuade them to speak with their GP or contact their local Health Trust.

If there are any fire risk concerns regarding hoarding, contact Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) to arrange a free ‘Home Fire Safety Check’. The visit will give firefighters a chance to offer fire safety advice for your home and make sure you know what to do if there is a fire and how to escape safely.

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 a safe and effective treatment for many illnesses. 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

- 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;

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

- Follow the guidance from your oxygen supplier.
- Never use smoking materials or an electronic cigarette whilst on oxygen therapy or close to a patient using oxygen equipment.
- Never charge any electronic devices around oxygen therapy equipment.
- Do not store or use oxygen equipment close to sources of heat; it is recommended that, when using oxygen, the cylinder 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.
- 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 the door behind you. Dial 999 and ask for the Fire & Rescue Service.

Carbon Monoxide

A number of tragic events in Northern Ireland involving Carbon Monoxide (CO) have led to a genuine increase in community concerns regarding the dangers of CO. The subsequent increase in the purchase of CO detection apparatus by the public has also seen a significant upsurge in CO incidents being reported to NIFRS.

What is Carbon Monoxide?

CO is an extremely poisonous and life threatening gas. It is a colourless, tasteless, odourless, non-irritating gas which is classified as a chemical asphyxiant. It is a by-product produced as a result of the incomplete combustion of carbon based fuels, ie, solid fuel, wood, gaseous fuels and liquid fuels due to poor ventilation or faulty equipment.

Important Information

All boilers and fuel burning appliances have the potential to produce CO and therefore it is important that they are serviced annually using a qualified engineer registered with the appropriate organisation.

- Gas Safe Register Tel: 0800 408 5500 www.gassaferegister.co.uk
- OFTEC (Oil) Tel: 0845 65 85 080 www.oftec.org
- NIACS (Chimney Sweeps) www.niacs.co.uk

For further CO advice contact HSENI Tel: 0800 0320 121 www.hseni.gov.uk/watchout

CO Alarm Information

A CO alarm is intended to warn of an accumulation of CO, enabling occupants to react before being exposed to significant risk. If a CO alarm activates it should not be considered an emergency situation requiring the Fire Service to attend unless lives are at risk.

Testing your CO alarm

Every alarm is different, so follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding frequency of testing. You should press the 'Test' button on each CO detector to ensure it is working. For a few seconds it will emit a high-pitched, loud beeping, usually louder than a smoke detector.

HSENI and NIFRS advice, should your alarm activate or you suspect the presence of CO, is to isolate all possible sources, ventilate the property and get out. Call your qualified registered engineer to determine if there has been a leak of CO.

Remember TASK

T – Turn off or extinguish all fuel burning appliances if safe to do so.

A – Air - Open all doors and windows to increase ventilation in the property and go outside and stay out in clean fresh air.

S – Seek medical assistance if you feel unwell. Go to your GP or nearest Accident and Emergency. For medical emergencies call 999 and ask for an ambulance.

K – Keep all appliances turned off until checked by a qualified registered engineer.

Emergency Information

For a CO emergency where the occupants' lives are at risk call 999 and ask for an ambulance and the Fire & Rescue Service. In this instance Get out, Stay out and get the Fire and Rescue Service out.

Referall Pathways

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) welcomes the assistance of partnership agencies to identify people at risk so that they can provide enhanced assistance to those who need help the most. NIFRS offers a free service to members of the community who are deemed people at risk.

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service define people at risk as persons who:

- are aged 50 or older;
- have a disability or impaired mobility*;
- or are referred to NIFRS by a partnership agency.

*includes people with a health condition that would impact on their ability to acknowledge and respond to an emergency in the home.

NIFRS will also accept referrals for people who fall outside of this definition but who may also be at risk. Each referral will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.
To make a referral, go to www.nifrs.org and click

Contacting the Prevention Team at NIFRS:

If you are an existing partner and need to get in touch with the Partnership Lead Officer in your area, contact your nearest District Office and ask for a member of the Prevention & Protection Team. District Office telephone numbers and email addresses are as follows (please note, District Offices operate Monday - Friday, 09:00-17:00.
If you require advice outside of these times, please call - 028 9266 4221):-

Ballymena

Telephone: 028 2564 3370
Email: ballymena.district@nifrs.org

Bangor

Telephone: 028 9127 1906
Email: bangor.district@nifrs.org

Belfast (South & East)

Telephone: 028 9047 3189
Email: s&e.district@nifrs.org

Belfast (North & West)

Telephone: 028 9075 4776
Email: n&w.district@nifrs.org

Coleraine

Telephone: 028 7082 5830
Email: coleraine.district@nifrs.org

Cookstown

Telephone: 028 8676 5936
Email: cookstown.district@nifrs.org

Downpatrick

Telephone: 028 4483 9308
Email: downpatrick.district@nifrs.org

Enniskillen

Telephone: 028 6634 6946
Email: enniskillen.district@nifrs.org

Glengormley

Telephone: 028 9084 0225
Email: glengormley.district@nifrs.org

Lisburn

Telephone: 028 9260 3360
Email: lisburn.district@nifrs.org

Londonderry

Telephone: 028 7131 1162
Email: londonderry.district@nifrs.org

Newry

Telephone: 028 3083 5633
Email: newry.district@nifrs.org

Omagh

Telephone: 028 8224 1190
Email: omagh.district@nifrs.org

Portadown

Telephone: 028 3833 3818
Email: portadown.district@nifrs.org

Safer Together Resources

Fire Risk Awareness Videos

There are two fire safety videos available, one for Social Work & Social Care and the other for service users and the family, friends and neighbours of older people.

These can be accessed at www.nifrs.org.

Risk Awareness Form

A Fire Risk Awareness form highlights fire risks for social workers in the community. This form can be accessed at **www.nifrs.org.**

Leaflets

Two fire safety leaflets and a door hanger are available. One leaflet is aimed at addressing the issue of neighbours not responding to smoke alarms sounding and the other is to highlight the main fire risks for older people on one page. These can be requested from NIFRS by emailing the Prevention Team at Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service at EACenhancedHFSC@nifrs.org.

Safety Devices and Resources

To provide fire safety solutions for the most vulnerable in the community various resources have been purchased to be available for service users in the Belfast Trust. The resources available are detailed below.

Smoking Aprons

As mentioned previously, service users that smoke are at an increased risk of having a fire in their home. The case study in the smoking section of this document, describes how a smoking apron could have been used to reduce fire risk. The aprons available are made from a flame-resistant PVC.

Personal Alarm

During focus groups, a number of the older people involved in the discussion expressed concern about escaping from their homes in the event of a fire. The older people in the co-production working group suggested that we provide personal alarms to be used in the event of a fire or any other emergency. These do not replace assistive technology or smoke alarms and are used to alert others.

Emergency Torches

Designed to offer low level light at night-time but also a bright LED torch in the event of a power cut, or emergency, allowing the occupant to evacuate the property quickly and safely. These were sourced by the co-production working group following suggestions made by service users.

Fire Resistant Bedding

During discussions with social workers in the community they described the challenges they face while trying to reduce the fire risk concerning smoking materials. While Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service advise against smoking in bed, or indeed smoking at all, fire resistant bedding help in reducing the fire risk for service users that continue to smoke.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

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Safer Together
PROJECT

Prevent Harm Raise the Alarm


Working Together


Excellence


Openness & Honesty


Compassion

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Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service