



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE**  
**FIRE AND RESCUE**

# Fatal Fires

Links between emollients, hospital discharge and reduced mobility

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1. Background
2. Risk Factors
3. 7 Minute Learning Tool
4. Further Information and Guidance
5. Do you know a CHARLIE?
6. Safe and Well Checks



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# Background

## Hundreds of fire deaths may be linked to skin creams, senior firefighter warns

Numerous fatalities have been attributed to paraffin-based products, said Chris Bell, a watch commander with West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service

Josh Gabbattiss Science Correspondent | @josh\_gabbattiss |  
Sunday 11 February 2018 15:15 | 4 shares |



Skin creams used to treat common conditions like eczema could be linked to hundreds of fire deaths, a senior firefighter has warned.

Chris Bell, a watch commander with West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, said creams containing paraffin can be a fire hazard, particularly when they soak into fabrics.

### Skin creams containing paraffin have been linked to dozens of fire deaths across England, the BBC has learned.

The products for conditions like eczema and psoriasis can leave people at risk of setting themselves ablaze.

If people use the creams regularly but do not often change clothes or bedding, paraffin residue can soak into the fabric, making it flammable.

The medicines regulator has updated its guidance and says all creams containing paraffin should carry a warning.

Despite warnings going back more than 10 years, BBC Radio 5 live Investigates has discovered there have been 37 deaths in England since 2010 linked to the creams.

<https://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/learning-safety-incidents/issue-3-fire-risk-use-emollient-creams>

The unsafe use of emollient creams can result in serious or fatal injuries from fire.

When supporting people to use emollient creams, it is important to be aware of the risks. You might use emollient creams to help manage dry skin conditions such as eczema or psoriasis.

If people using a paraffin-based emollient product cover it with a dressing or clothing, there's a danger that smoking or using a naked flame could cause these dressings or clothing to catch fire. There may also be reactions between emollients and fibres of dressings, clothing and items such as towels when used to carry out personal care.

### Issues notified to CQC

In May 2018, CQC was notified of a fire at a care home in Lancashire. Nine residents were evacuated and there were no injuries to staff or residents. The fire started in the laundry room after emollient creams reacted with cotton towels. The fire authority issued an enforcement notice requiring the provider to make sure:

- all emollients are stored securely
- risk assessments are updated to reflect the use and storage of emollients



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# NEWS

WEATHER • LOCAL • BUSINESS • SPORT

## **Bedridden great-grandmother died in fire started by dropped cigarette and paraffin based cream**

Arthritis sufferer Pauline Taylor, 74 dropped a lit cigarette or match on her bed



# NEWS

• EXCLUSIVE NEWS TODAY •

## **Alarm over skin creams linked to 15 fire deaths: Warning treatments containing paraffin or petroleum can make bedsheets and clothing Flammable**

- 15 deaths over 3 years in London have been linked to flammable creams
- Ointments impregnate clothing or sheets then act as a wick when ignited
- Fire Service warn washing clothes, even at high temperature, does not fix issue

# NEWS

WEATHER LOCAL BUSINESS SPORT

## **Bedbound great-grandmother, 74 died in a fireball after a dropped cigarette started a blaze that intensified due to the paraffin cream she used to treat illness**

• Pauline Taylor, 74 lit a cigarette in bed which ignited after touching her paraffin based creams



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# NEWS

WEATHER + LOCAL + BUSINESS + SPORT

## **Bedridden great-grandmother died in fire started by dropped cigarette and paraffin based cream.**

Arthritis sufferer Pauline Taylor, 74 dropped a lit cigarette or match on her bed





## 1. Background

Protection from fire and prevention of future deaths

The Fire Safety Order 2005 requires the identification of residents at risk as part of the fire safety risk assessment for the premises, this would include taking appropriate action to remove or reduce the risk.

## 2. Why it matters

A personal risk assessment for each resident is critical to their own safety and that of other residents and staff. This will assess the needs of the resident in conjunction with care workers and family. It will consider their habits, their physical and mental capacity and their environment. The risk assessment should be recorded and considered as part of their care plan, other assessments and personal evacuation plans, and kept under review.

## 7. Questions to consider

- Is the resident a smoker?
- Are emollients being applied?
- Does this product contain paraffin?
- Is the resident's mobility reduced?

If yes, share the risks with the resident, their GP, nurse practitioner and family members.

ACT; consider an alternative product

## 6. What to do

This increased risk of fire posed by smoking whilst using flammable emollient creams is so significant that it must be avoided.

Fire retardant covers, bedding or clothing for smokers must always be provided. There must be sufficient numbers of these items to allow regular laundering at the correct temperature. This is the responsibility of the resident, the care provider, the care home or housing management provider and family members.

## 3. Information

Consider the risk posed by residents smoking on your premises. This follows inquests into the deaths from burn injuries of high-risk client smokers with mobility problems as a result of matches or cigarettes dropping on to clothing or bedding.

## 4.

Emollient creams are used to treat dry skin conditions. Certain creams can be highly flammable (e.g. those that are paraffin based) and pose a significant risk in the event of a fire. The fire risk posed by the use of such emollient creams is significantly increased when the resident is smoking. The resident's bedding and clothing can also become impregnated with cream, increasing flammability and the risk to the resident.

## 5.

The use of emollient creams must be considered in your fire risk assessment to ensure that all reasonably practicable steps are taken to reduce the risk of a fire and its likelihood of occurring.

# Emollients and Smoking

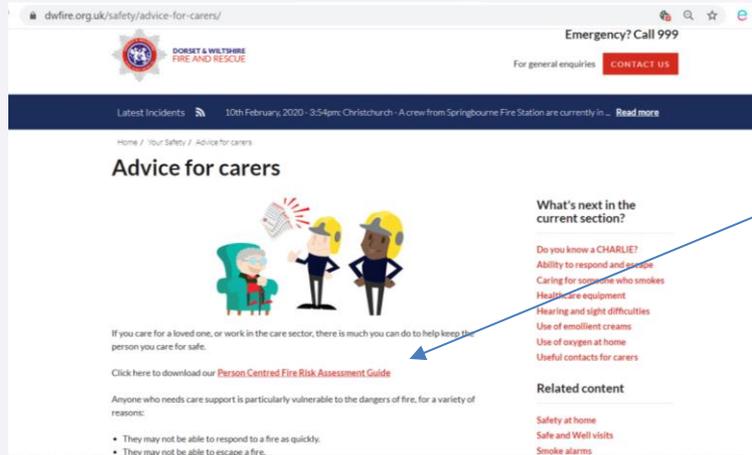
Adapted from the Lancashire Safeguarding Adults Board and Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service information



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# Further Information

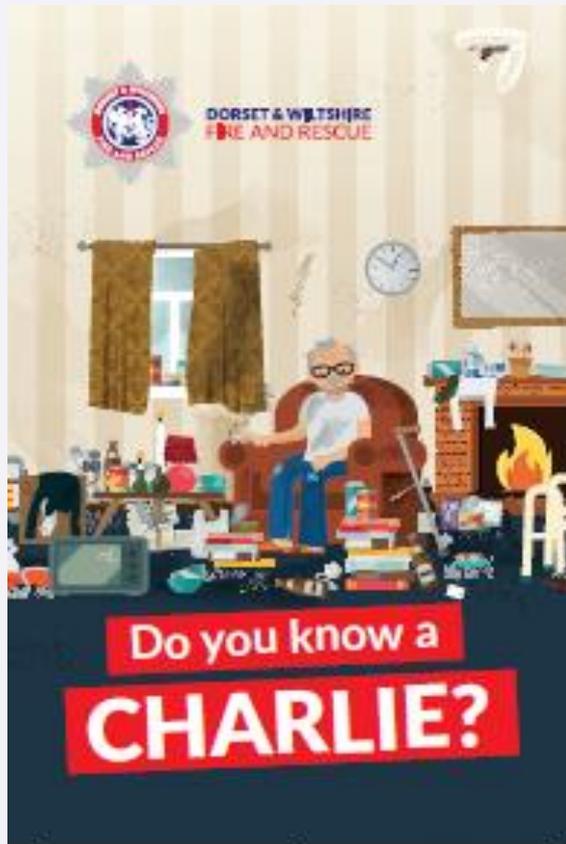
<https://www.dwfire.org.uk/safety/advice-for-carers/>



Person Centred  
Risk Assessment



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Care and support needs  
Hoarding and mental health issues  
Alcohol and medication  
Reduced mobility  
Lives alone  
Inappropriate smoking  
Elderly - 65+

### Recognise anyone?

If you know someone who displays one or more of these characteristics, get in touch, as statistics show they may be at more risk of fire. Visit: [dwfire.org.uk/safe-and-well-visits](http://dwfire.org.uk/safe-and-well-visits)  
Call: 0800 038 2323  
email: [safeandwell@dwfire.org.uk](mailto:safeandwell@dwfire.org.uk)

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**FREEPHONE  
0800 038  
2323**

**safeandwell@  
dwfire.org.uk**

**[www.dwfire.org.  
uk/safety/safe-  
and-well-visits](http://www.dwfire.org.uk/safety/safe-and-well-visits)**

**Think...**

**...if a fire occurred in your home,  
could you escape easily?**

If you answered **no** to either of these questions about yourself or someone you know, the advice in this leaflet could save your life and the lives of others...

**...and could  
you raise the alarm  
and call us?**

**Be prepared**

We're offering you free safe and well advice, tailored to your needs and lifestyle choices.

You may also be entitled to a free safe & well visit. This will help to reduce the risk of fire in your home and to keep you safe and well.

We will provide free of charge:

- Custom-made information
- Install new and check existing smoke alarms
- Advice on where to get help if needed

Introducing



visits in your community

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# Questions?

Thank you

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