

7 minute briefing: Emollients, smoking and fire risk

- 1. Background.** Protection from fire and prevention of future deaths: several tragic deaths of residents within care homes have led to the Coroner making recommendations about the appropriate levels of fire safety within care facilities. Are these avoidable? Yes. The issues need urgent consideration and action by professionals to identify critical risks associated with individuals. The Fire Safety Order 2005 requires the identification of individuals at risk as part of the fire safety risk assessment for the premises and to take appropriate action or reduce the risk.
- 2. Why it matters.** A personal risk assessment for each resident is critical for their own safety and that of other residents and staff. This will assess the needs of the individual in conjunction with care workers and family and consider their habits, 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.
- 3. Information.** Coroner's advice is that you must consider the risk posed by individuals smoking on your premises, particularly if the person at risk has limited mobility. This follows inquests into the deaths of high-risk smokers with mobility problems from burn injuries as a result of matches or cigarettes dropping on to clothing or bedding.
- 4. Emollients.** Emollient creams are used to treat dry skin conditions, and some patients are often in bed for lengthy periods due to illness or impaired mobility. These creams can be highly flammable and pose a significant risk in the event of a fire; it is important to note that the risk exists in emollients that contain paraffin and in those that don't. The fire risk posed by using such emollient creams is significantly increased when the user is smoking. The individual's bedding and clothing can also become impregnated with cream, increasing flammability and their risk to the user.
- 5. Learning from fire deaths.** Following recent fire deaths, the Coroner highlighted that the use of such creams should be risk assessed, and action taken to reduce the harm. 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 it's likelihood of occurring.
- 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.
- 7. Points to consider.** Is the person a smoker? Are emollients being applied? If yes, share risks with the individuals, GP or nurse prescriber, and family members. Consider a referral to Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue for a Home Fire Safety Assessment ([see here for further details](#)). To find out more about Emollient Products & Fire Safety visit [Emollients - Greater Manchester Fire Rescue Service](#).