

Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service
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Dear Sir/Madam

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION – EMOLLIENT CREAM FIRE RISK

Emollient creams and paraffin based creams are frequently used to treat dry skin conditions, such as psoriasis and eczema. These products are safe to use but can soak into clothing, dressings and bedding leaving a flammable residue particularly when used in large quantities or when applied to large areas of the body.

If exposed to a naked flame or a heat source, such as a cigarette, lighter, gas cooker, candle or heater, these saturated fabrics can easily catch fire; the paraffin residue will help the fire develop and spread rapidly which could result in serious injury or death.

The latest research has shown that even low paraffin content creams and some non paraffin based emollients can increase the flammability of fabrics.

What can you do to reduce the risk?

- Emollient cream users should be kept away from ignition sources such as naked flames and cigarettes as dressings and clothing can be easily ignited – bedding can also become impregnated, increasing flammability.
- Peoples clothing and bedding should be changed and washed regularly, preferably daily and at the highest possible temperature for the product.
- Staff should be made aware of the added fire risk associated with residents smoking whilst using emollient creams as clothing is likely to be readily ignited by a dropped cigarette. This is particularly important where residents have a condition which places them at high risk of fire such as memory loss, confusion or drowsiness.
- Residents should (where appropriate) be given information that includes advice about the potential risks associated with smoking (or being near to people who are smoking), or exposure to any naked flame or other potential source of ignition during treatment.
- Staff should ensure that residents who self-administer topical preparations are aware of and are adhering to safety advice and where this is not the case then additional control measures should be put in place.
- Relatives or carers should be informed if a resident does not comply with safety advice and instructions during treatment involving significant quantities of emollients.

- Personal risk assessments should be undertaken for emollient users who may be at increased risk such as smokers and oxygen users.
- Where possible, use emollient creams with the lowest paraffin content possible or use a non-paraffin based emollient, particularly for residents using medical oxygen. This will not remove the risk but will help to reduce it.
- Discussions should take place with medical practitioners to identify alternative skin treatments where practicable, particularly where residents smoke and/or have a condition which places them at high risk of fire such as memory loss, confusion or drowsiness.

West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service has produced a video aimed at care professionals, which demonstrates the potential fire hazards associated with paraffin-based skin products. It describes a house fire in 2015, which tragically resulted in the death of a 74-year-old woman who used this type of skin product.

The video can be viewed by visiting their website at <https://www.westyorksfire.gov.uk/your-safety/home/emollient-skin-products/> and clicking the link at the bottom of the page titled 'Video – Health and Care Professional Informative'.

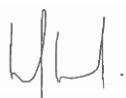
Unfortunately, this sort of incident is not uncommon and has resulted in a number of fatalities but you can do something to reduce the risk.

If you own or manage a commercial premises, such as a care home, then you must comply with fire legislation set out in the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Part of this legislation requires the responsible person to carry out a fire risk assessment to identify the hazards and consider who may be at risk. You will then be able to decide whether the risks identified are acceptable or whether you need to take steps to reduce or control them.

The use of emollient creams must be addressed as part of the fire risk assessment including the hazards associated with their use. Action must be taken to ensure that adequate control measures have been implemented to manage those risks and reduce the risk from fire.

If you need further advice please consult the HM Government Guide to Fire Safety Risk Assessment in Residential Care Premises which provides more comprehensive guidance on how to meet the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. These publications can be obtained from the Business Safety section of our website <https://www.cheshirefire.gov.uk/business-safety>.

Yours sincerely



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