

# Self-Neglect and Hoarding Event 3

Tuesday 22 Nov 2022 - Session 3

## 7-minute briefing on “Stay safe as you stay warm”

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### 1: What is the risk?

During 2021 – 181 fire fatalities in England, 76 homes involved during the last 3 months of that year (Oct/Nov/Dec) presenting a rise of 41% above the previous year figures.

Accidental Dwelling Fires (ADF) caused by candles in 2021/22 – 940 in England – the highest recorded figure in 10 years. Last 4 fatal fires in Norfolk involved portable heaters. 1 in 4 homes are considered in fuel poverty but this could now be higher.

### 2: How changes in usual behaviour can increase risk...

- Changing behaviours can raise the risk of ADF and carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Cost of living crisis – saving money/cutting costs – changing behaviours / lifestyle / routines affect daily life, risks people are prepared to take or have no choice.
- Looking for alternative or more risky ways to heat and power homes, increasing dangers and greater risk of fire.

### 3: Cost of living issues...

4.5 million more people, - increase of 8% - are planning to use electric heaters to stay warm – more than one third of these people have never done so before. Increased likelihood of misuse or accident occurring. In a bid not to pay more, some people may end up paying a higher price through accidental fire which causes them serious injury, loss of home or loss of life.

We are witnessing more households not investing in home/household insurance to help save money. No insurance would only further impact and devastate if a home was lost or someone suffered injuries preventing them working.

#### 4: Different ways of heating homes...

Expected increase in use of portable heaters, open fires and wood burners. Again, new users to these types of heat sources may cause increase in misuse or accident. Many rural Norfolk villages rely on oil for heating – oil has sharply risen in price putting pressure on budgets which can lead to alternatives being considered.

- Fires caused by portable heaters, open fires and electrical items can be very intense and spread very quickly.
- For those who cannot mobilise quickly or unaided this presents high risk in regard evacuation in emergency.
- “One room living” – increase in people living/sleeping within one room in the home, only heating one room, another change in behaviour/lifestyle due to impact of cost of living or older age – or combination of factors.
- Often witnessed in homes of older people, living alone with reduced mobility.

#### 5: Case study...

London Fire Brigade – Fire fatality in April 2022 – portable heater became stuck underneath the reclining chair of an older lady – reclining chairs a common piece of furniture to assist the comfort and ease of access for poor mobility. She enjoyed the warmth and comfort of placing the portable heater close to her legs. She was unable or unaware of the heater falling and becoming stuck under her chair. She spent most of her waking and sleeping hours in the chair. The resulting accidental fire caused her to lose her life.

#### 6: Ripple effect...

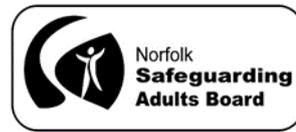
... of Accidental Dwelling Fires on individuals, families, friends, neighbours, communities, properties and wider Services. Traditionally we focussed on property, particularly in those homes considered ‘hoarded’ or ‘neglected’ and enforcing house clearance. We know this method does not have medium or long term benefits to anyone involved. The individual will replace or return to known/ingrained patterns of behaviour if we don’t support them.

Solution – focus on the individual not the property. Help them to identify why and put their safety at the heart and centre of discussion and action.

Person-centred care though home visits/consistent and regular interaction with a trusted point-of-contact/quality conversation and listening. Professional curiosity/observations.

## 7: Fire Prevention/Risk reduction – guidance for all domestic dwellings (not just those presenting risk on the Clutter Image Rating scale)

- Smoke Alarms – are they fitted? Are they working? Are they situated correctly? Are there sufficient for the type of property? If rental property, has the Landlord provided as per their legal responsibility? Are they tested regularly? Importantly, can the individual (occupier/s) hear the alarm when it actuates (alarm sounds)? Do they require additional aids?
- Carbon Monoxide Alarms – a requirement in rented property. Recommended to install in any property using heating appliances not running off electricity (appliances burning fuels such as gas, oil, wood and coal)
- Evacuation/Escape Plan – do they have a plan? Can they escape unaided? Are there any hazards that can be reduced to aid escape?
- Correct fuels being used in wood burners/open fires – new users or people reducing costs may turn to burning unsuitable or hazardous materials on their fire/wood burner. Has the chimney been swept?
- Not using portable heaters or open fires to dry clothes – consider distance and placement – at least 1 metre away from a person or combustible materials (chairs/sofas/curtains/etc.) Purchasing heaters from a reputable source. Checking for broken or frayed cables. Being aware of electrical burning smell from older or malfunctioning heaters. Keeping them on a level surface and giving them 'space to breathe'.
- Home/Household Insurance
- Electrical Appliances – maintaining them (removing lint/fluff from tumble dryers for example), not overloading sockets or adapters, not using appliances when unattended. More than half of the UK's ADF are caused by electricity, 9 out of 10 electrical fires are caused by electrical products.
- Advise people not to use camping stoves or BBQs indoors. High risk of carbon monoxide poisoning and accidental fire inside the home, they are not designed for this type of use.
- LED lights or torches are far safer than candles.
- LPG fuel – LPG (Liquified petroleum gas) 84% of UK homes are connected to the gas grid but some 4 million are off-grid and dependent on other sources of fuel for heating and cooking. LPG is cheaper, with low installation costs. It can however cause additional moisture in the air/home giving a damp, colder feel which in turn encourages the occupier to increase the temperature but this does not aid the problem. Additional moisture in some properties can be detrimental to both the property and the health of some individuals, particularly to older people.



- Be aware of households who may have 'bypassed' their mains electric and gas meters. Tampering with electricity or gas supplies is incredibly dangerous. The significant dangers of attempting this involve shocks and severe burns, electrical fires, lethal gas leaks and house fires.
- Be aware of changes in configuration of rooms or part-use of rooms within a home.

### **Feedback from the breakout groups:**

- Joint visits with fire service have been really beneficial to highlight safety concerns
- Communication and multi-disciplinary working is important
- A simplified Norfolk Fire service, fire risk assessment template that professionals can fill in with people that will not give consent for fire service to enter property but have built a trust with somebody else, often when we identify risks it is taken as a personal opinion, a fire dept risk template may help alleviate this.
- Risks: evidencing the safety details discussed with the Fire Officer to ensure the householder understands and can action any points. Capacity in question? Can the officer return to review the suggestions made and report back to the referrer?