



NFCC
National Fire
Chiefs Council

Cost of living: Steps to stay fire safe



#StayFireSafe

Cost of living

The cost of living rise will continue to have an impact on fire risks in the home, potentially changing them exaggerating them, or introducing new ones, as well as bringing new people into at-risk groups. The number of people living in fuel poverty is expected to rise dramatically over the winter months of 2022-2023.

By January 2023, more than half of UK households could be in fuel poverty - this is likely to lead to increased fire risk at home. (University of York's Social Policy Research Unit)

The role of fire and rescue services to support vulnerable households to prevent fire has never been more important. Whilst the basis of our [person-centred-approach](#) to preventing fires in the home has not changed, we recognise that increased and new risks mean that we have to work with our national and local partners to ensure that adequate support is in place to address these emerging and growing risks.

Fire and rescue services understand communities through local partnership working and understand socio-economic deprivation within local areas. Fire and rescue services must recognise that those who are currently or have historically been deemed as living in deprivation will not be the only cohort affected by economic and fuel challenge as the cost of living crisis intensifies.

This toolkit is the National Fire Chiefs Council's (NFCC) **phase one** response to the current situation and work in this area will continue to develop and evolve as we address changing and emerging risks.

The potential scale of the issue

- 15 million households (there are about 28 million households in the UK)
- 89.1% couple with 4+ children
- 88% of lone parents with 2+ children
- 82.6% of pensioner couples

There will be significant variations in fuel poverty across regions.

Further details are attached in University of York's Social Policy Research Unit's report Fuel Poverty Estimates for the UK. This is useful background information and should be consulted for further details of the estimates. Please see attached document.

Some sources predict the number of households entering into fuel poverty will be higher than predicted.

Fire and rescue services can expect to see a larger number of people/households who we would define as being vulnerable to fire and an increase in behaviours which can increase the risk of fire. Outcomes might include increases in accidental dwelling fires, associated fire injuries and fire fatalities.

It's also important to remember that cost of living rises will affect us all in some way. This includes fire and rescue staff – whether they work in a support or an operational role.

We encourage fire and rescue services to ensure staff are signposted to support available within their own service such as occupational health, welfare, EAPs and any other internal support they have available. Some of the messages in the toolkit may be appropriate for some staff particularly those in non-prevention or non-operational roles.

Behaviours

Messaging is clearly a priority, but the top priority must be 'How do we influence and change behaviour?' It must be understood that messaging should not just be directing people what not to do. Messaging should be underpinned with a reason and rationale as to why something may put an individual or household more at risk and safer behaviour or alternative if possible. By messaging in such a manner, better engagement can be achieved enabling more potential for fire and rescue services to influence and change risky behaviours.

We have identified the following issues as key causes for concern that prevention activity should address.

- **Using alternative, and potentially unfamiliar and/or dangerous, heating methods**
- **Alarms and detection**
- **Home reconfiguration or part-use**
- **Electrical safety**
- **By-passing of electric and gas meters**
- **Tobacco use**
- **Cooking**
- **Candles**

Tone

It's important to consider the cost of living context when promoting fire prevention messaging, recognising that people's priorities will be cost-saving and that a softer approach is required. It should not be patronising or preach but should indicate that things should be done "**where possible**", but with alternative or secondary advice should people be unable to follow all the advice for financial reasons.

Press release template for FRSs Embargoed 00:01hrs Wednesday 5th October

Name of FRS urges people to ‘Stay Fire Safe’ this winter

Name of FRS is urging people to take simple steps to protect themselves from accidental fires and carbon monoxide poisoning as they look to keep warm and cut energy use this winter.

The call comes following concerns from the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) that the cost of living rise will mean people turn to alternative ways of heating and lighting their homes.

Name of FRS is supporting NFCC’s Stay Fire Safe campaign to provide advice to help reduce the fire risks in the home.

As part of the campaign **Name of FRS** is encouraging people to complete an online home fire safety check for themselves or their loved ones. By answering a few simple questions, it will provide fire safety advice specific to you and tips on how to keep you and your household safe from fire www.ohfsc.co.uk. For those most at risk of fire we can visit the home to provide help and advice.

It’s crucial people ensure they have working smoke alarms – at least one on each level of the home. Where you have a heating appliance that doesn’t run off electricity, we recommend installing a carbon monoxide alarm – it’s the only way to detect this harmful, colourless, odourless gas which can be fatal. Check alarms are working by pushing the test button at least once a month.

It’s important that where people are able to only heat one room and are using that for both living and sleeping they can clearly hear alarms so they can be alerted to a fire or dangerous levels of carbon monoxide when asleep.

Changes to regulations now (***will mean**) mean landlords must fit smoke alarms in all homes and carbon monoxide alarms where there is fixed combustion heating appliance in rented accommodation (***Wales to add from 1st December**). We advise tenants to ensure their landlord is complying to help keep them safe.

Northern Ireland FRS adjust above to reference Private Tenancies Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 and Scottish FRS change detail in line with the tolerable standard amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act

The campaign will also share advice on heating and appliance safety, candles and electrical safety.

FRS spokesperson said “It’s really important that as we all cope safely with the rise in the cost of living we don’t put ourselves or our loved ones at risk. **Name of FRS** can provide advice on reducing the risk of a devastating accidental fire and will be working to support our community and help keep them safe.”

Include mention any local events planned to provide advice for communities

To help keep you safe

- Check any heating appliances are in good working order and not subject to a product recall [by checking the Office for Product Safety and Standards website for any alerts or recalls](#)
- Ensure flammable items such as furniture and drying clothes are placed well away from heaters and fires
- Ensure you use the correct fuel for woodburning stoves and open fires – to reduce the risk of toxic fumes, chimney fires and carbon monoxide poisoning
- Check your escape routes, make sure they are clear from clutter and items such as portable heaters are not blocking them.
- If possible don't skip servicing of boilers and gas appliances by a Gas Safe engineer to prevent gas leaks and CO poisoning. Landlords must arrange for an annual gas safety check in rented accommodation. If you're a homeowner check your energy provider's website for information about their Priority Services Register – if you're eligible they often offer a free annual gas safety check along with other support.

Online Home Fire Safety Checks

Fire safety advice and a virtual check is available to anyone and was made available to all FRSs in England. It was developed to complement the person – centred framework. www.ohfsc.co.uk

This tool can provide advice and reassurance to the worried well but if it identifies the person is at increased risk and will benefit from a physical visit, this is flagged up to the appropriate FRS.

The online home fire safety check can be used by third parties (police, social worker, care agencies) when visiting a person's home, either because they might have concerns about a person's welfare or to aid the work of the FRS. Therefore, FRSs should ensure that they have provided information about this tool and the benefits to those agencies they are working with.

Further information on the tool is available <https://www.ukfrs.com/prevention/online-home-fire-safety-check>

Suggested social media messaging

We are all looking at ways to reduce our energy bills. Make sure you #StayFireSafe and don't put yourself at risk of fire in your home. See our advice for your home here [Online Home Fire Safety Check](#)

Fire and rescue services are concerned that many people are at increased risk of fire as they look for ways to reduce energy bills. Ensure your home is not at risk by completing our short [Online Home Fire Safety Check](#) #StayFireSafe

If you've put off having your usual gas safety check, please book one now to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning, gas leaks and explosions in your home <https://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/> #StayFireSafe

How are your loved ones coping with heating and cooking? You could help family and friends by helping them complete an [Online Home Fire Safety Check](#) #StayFireSafe

Fire and rescue services can often help refer people to partner agencies and ensure homes have suitable smoke detection and advice. Contact us or complete our [Online Home Fire Safety Check](#) to help #StayFireSafe

*Fire and rescue services with their own virtual check tool will be able to promote this in place of NFCC's online tool.

Using alternative and potentially unfamiliar heating methods

Many people may avoid using central heating and look to use portable heaters and open fires in the rooms they use. Portable heaters are not restricted to electric heaters and can present additional risks so must be considered.

Consider the fuel your community might ordinarily use. For example, rural areas may not use mains gas but oil which is not covered by the price cap and alternative heating could be more prevalent. In more urban areas residents heat networks aren't covered by the price cap. This can cover people in some residential developments and social housing.

Standard fire safety advice applies and should be used. Additional advice is included where NFCC has identified behaviours - specifically in response to the cost of living rise. This should be used to supplement standard fire safety advice for heating. **These are behaviours that crews could look out for and provide appropriate safety advice during home visits.**

Portable heaters

Many people will be using devices that may not have been used for several years or they've had stored away for emergencies – such as when central heating has needed repair. [Check that your heater is not subject to a product recall or repair](#)

Heaters must not be placed where they will block an escape route.

Plug electric heaters into a wall socket not an extension lead - they can easily be overloaded and cause fires

They must only be moved when they have been switched off and have cooled down.

Only use a heater in rooms they are designed to be used in. Standard portable heaters (gas and electric) must not be used in shower or bathrooms. Portable gas heaters must not be used in bedrooms and should only be used in well ventilated rooms.

Never install, repair or service appliances yourself. Make sure anyone who does is registered with the [Gas Safe Register](#) (for gas appliances), the [Heating Equipment Testing and Approval Scheme](#) (HETAS) (for solid fuel appliances), or the [Oil Firing Technical Association](#) (OFTEC) (for oil appliances), or a qualified electrician for electric heaters.

Make sure gas, paraffin and LPG cylinders are stored safely outside the home and out of direct sunlight. They should not be stored on balconies which can be important escape route for your home and a crucial entrance to your home for firefighters.

Make sure you change cylinders for portable heaters in a well-ventilated place and away sources of heat and ignition.

Many people will be looking to buy heaters - we must advise them to try and do this as safety as possible

Avoid second-hand heaters but if you need to buy one check it closely for damage - if in doubt avoid it. Make sure it is made by a manufacturer you recognise and if the seller cannot provide the instruction manual look online and download a copy. This will ensure you know how to use the heater correctly and can reduce the risk of fire.

[Check before buying that the heater has not been subject to a recall.](#) If you do buy a second hand heater and it's under 12 years old, you can still register the product with the manufacturer and you will need the model number and serial number. You can either do this by getting in touch directly with the manufacturer or on the [AMDEA website](#) for a number of manufacturers.

When buying new

Make sure you buy from recognised manufacturers and retailers. This will reduce the risk of buying a counterfeit and unsafe heater. Register your products with the manufacturer or on the [AMDEA website](#). This will mean in the event of a recall or repair the manufacturer can easily get in touch with you.

Solid fuel heating

Ensure you burn the correct fuel in open fires and wood burning stoves. Burning other materials can cause toxic fumes in your home and can increase the risk of chimney fires and carbon monoxide poisoning.

[Open fires and wood burning stove Department for Environment & Rural Affairs – A practical guide](#)

You must not reopen and use an old fireplace without a professional doing the work. The chimney is likely to be unsafe and can lead to a fire and/or carbon monoxide leaking into your home or even your neighbour's home.

Outdoor heaters

You must only use heaters that are designed for indoor use. Outdoor heaters must not be used indoors. They can produce a lot of heat which would be a fire risk in the confined space of a house, but they also produce carbon monoxide which can be fatal.



When using your heating (additional messages which apply to all heating types)

Don't sit too close to a heater, it could set fire to your clothes or chair. Check your loved ones are using their heaters safely. This is also especially important if you or family members regularly use emollient products which can make clothing and soft furnishings more flammable.

Never use heaters or open fires to dry clothes. If you need to dry clothes in the same room as a heater or open fire, ensure they are placed well away from the heat to reduce the risk of fire.

Gas Safety Checks

Many homeowners may have avoided having their gas safety checks for boilers and appliances due to the cost. If possible, people should be encouraged to have a gas safety check.

Below are points which could be highlighted on FRS websites to ensure people are getting the checks they are legally entitled to as tenants. Also some support some homeowners might be able to access to help cover the cost of a gas safety check.

Anyone who is a tenant should have an annual gas safety check for any fixed appliances.. This must be done by their landlord. So, they should not have missed out on these lifesaving checks. If their landlord is failing to provide this, they should report this to the local authority.

Could you be missing out on free lifesaving gas safety check for your home?

If you are a homeowner and have not has a gas safety check in the last 12 months, it's worth checking to see if you are eligible to join your energy provider's Priority Services Register. Most will offer a free annual gas check. You must meet their criteria which varies depending on your supplier.

Some providers (but not all) will need you to be in receipt of a means tested benefit, either be older or have a child aged 5 or under, or have a long-term disability or illness. Some providers will help if you find yourself in temporary situation such as a short-term illness, job loss, bereavement or recovering after a hospital visit.

As eligibility varies it's worth contacting your energy provider or [Gas Distribution Network](#) to find out if your household or someone you know could benefit. The quickest way is to visit your energy providers website and search for Priority Service Register. Many allow you to check online and sign up or call a free phone number to check if you can access it.

Suggested social media messaging

Never use heaters or open fires to dry clothes. If you need to dry clothes in the same room as a heater or open fire, ensure they are placed well away from the heat to reduce the risk of fire #StayFireSafe



Helping you
#StayFireSafe

If using portable heaters, take a minute to check they are still in good working order and not subject to a product recall <https://www.gov.uk/product-safety-alerts-reports-recalls> #StayFireSafe

Electric heaters should be plugged into a wall socket – do not use extension leads as they can easily be overloaded and cause a fire #StayFireSafe

If you regularly use emollients, it's important not to sit or dry fabrics close to heaters and fireplaces. Fabrics even if washed will have flammable residue on them #StayFireSafe

Open fires and wood burning stoves may be a cosy way to keep warm but please use the right fuel to avoid fire risk and toxic fumes #StayFireSafe

If you've put off having your usual gas safety check, please book one now to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning, gas leaks and explosions in your home. If you're a homeowner and are concerned about the cost, you might be able to get a free check via your energy provider's Priority Services Register #StayFireSafe ([Link to information on FRS website from above](#))

How are your loved ones heating their home? Please check on family, friends and vulnerable people who you think could be struggling to heat their home or are using new ways of keeping warm. Fire services can help and have advice to keep them safe [Online Home Fire Safety Check](#) #StayFireSafe

Alarms and detection

Standard fire safety messaging around the installation and testing of smoke alarms is crucial.

Messaging should not only be around asking people to install them. Many people will not be in a position to pay for smoke alarms, so it's important FRS highlight that if you do not have working smoke alarms or enough for your home your local FRS may be able to help or if you are a tenant your home should have these provided by landlords. Appropriate detection for the person not just the home must be considered as part of the person-centred approach to the Home Fire Safety Visit.

NFCC is concerned that the high cost of gas will lead to many more unsafe behaviours as people look to save money as covered in other areas of this toolkit. The use of unserviced gas appliances, old and or damaged gas heaters, postponing chimney sweeping or even using gas hobs as a source of heating. There is a carbon monoxide poisoning risk as well as a fire risk with these types of behaviours and the only way of detecting the poisoning is by installing a working carbon monoxide alarm.

The covid pandemic had already presented concerns about an increase in unsafe appliances [ITV news report featuring NFCC CO Lead – Craig Drinkald](#)

There have been changes to regulations in the UK and many more households will require both carbon monoxide and smoke alarms. This should be communicated to landlords, housing providers and tenants to ensure they have the detection required by law. People need to know their rights to keep themselves and their families safe.

England

[The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms \(Amendment\) Regulations 2022](#) will come into force on **1st October 2022**.

From that date landlords must

1. Ensure at least one smoke alarm is equipped on each storey of their homes where there is a room used as living accommodation. This has been a legal requirement in the private rented sector since 2015.
2. Ensure a carbon monoxide alarm is equipped in any room used as living accommodation which contains a fixed combustion appliance (excluding gas cookers).
3. Ensure smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms are repaired or replaced once informed and found that they are faulty.

The requirements are enforced by local authorities who can impose a fine of up to £5,000 where a landlord fails to comply with a remedial notice.

For landlords and tenants: [Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm \(Amendment\) Regulations 2022: guidance for landlords and tenants - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/smoke-and-carbon-monoxide-alarm-amendment-regulations-2022)

For local authorities: [Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm \(Amendment\) Regulations 2022: guidance for local authorities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/smoke-and-carbon-monoxide-alarm-amendment-regulations-2022)

Changes to the government's Approved Document J from 1st October will also require that carbon monoxide alarms are fitted alongside the installation of fixed combustion appliances of any fuel type (excluding gas cookers). This applies to all homes and should be undertaken as part of the scheduled works by competent professionals.

Approved Document J guidance: [Approved Document J 2022 amendments: circular 03/2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/approved-document-j-2022-amendments)

Wales

[Renting Home \(Wales\) Act 2016 under the regulations for FFHH](#) 1st December 2022 landlords must ensure working carbon monoxide alarms are fitted where there is any gas appliance, oil-fire combustions appliance or solid fuel burning combustion appliance. Smoke alarms on every storey, in working order, hard wired and interlinked with other hard wired smoke alarms as minimum requirement.

Suggested social media messaging

England

Did you know that from 1 October there's changes to smoke and carbon monoxide detection laws in all rented homes in England? Is your landlord helping you #StayFireSafe [Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm \(Amendment\) Regulations 2022: guidance for landlords and tenants - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/smoke-and-carbon-monoxide-alarm-amendment-regulations-2022) (or [link to information and advice for tenants and landlords on FRS website](#))



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Helping you
#StayFireSafe

Wales

Did you know there's changes from 1 December to smoke and carbon monoxide alarms in rented homes in Wales? Is your landlord helping you #StayFireSafe [Renting Home \(Wales\) Act 2016 under the regulations for FFHH](#) (or [link to information and advice for tenants and landlords on FRS website](#))

Home reconfiguration or part use

People may decide to restrict the areas of the home they use in order to save heating the whole house or keeping multiple rooms warm. This often means using one room for both living and sleeping.

In the past this has most often been seen in older people who are sole occupants of the home, but this may not be restricted to older people in the future. **Again, this type of change in behaviour is worth noting by crews undertaking home visits.**

From a fire and carbon monoxide risk the issues this raises are the need for detection in the rooms they are using, potential lack of ventilation for heating appliances (CO risk) and potential clutter, which means proximity of flammable materials to sources of heat and candles.

Suggested social media messaging

If you are spending more time in just a couple of rooms in your home to save on heating, make sure you have working smoke alarms in or near the rooms you use most #StayFireSafe

Ensure you have a working carbon monoxide alarm in the same room as any heating appliance which does not run off electricity. Remember to switch off heaters and extinguish fires before sleeping to reduce your risk of fire or carbon monoxide poisoning #StayFireSafe

If you are using fewer rooms to save on heating make sure there's space around heaters, open fires and candles to reduce the risk of a fire in your home #StayFireSafe

It's important to try and keep warm. When using gas or oil portable heaters and solid fuel heating you need to make sure rooms are well ventilated. This can reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Make sure you have working carbon monoxide and smoke alarms #StayFireSafe

If you've had to change the way you use your home to save on energy, you should review you escape routes in case of a fire. Do you still know the quickest route out and is the route and exits clear of clutter? #StayFireSafe



Electrical safety

NFCC has worked closely with Electrical Safety First to identify the areas of concern and to ensure messaging is aligned.

[Cost of living – Electrical Safety First #SavingSafely](#)

[A Costly Saving: Highly Dangerous 'Energy Saving' Devices Put Consumers At Risk As Cost of Living Crisis Bites](#)

Additional campaign resources will be available in autumn with a focus on second hand electrical goods

Electrical Fire Safety Week beginning 14 November and will include a focus on cost of living and personal heating devices.

The main area we identified as a concern is time of use tariffs (specifically those which provide cheaper electricity when the household is likely to sleep). Modern tariffs are linked to smart meters and benefitted people using electric vehicles or with battery storage systems. But this could also encourage people to run white goods such as washing machines, tumble dryers or dishwashers overnight.

Due to high energy costs we appreciate that people on tariffs will run appliances overnight in an attempt to reduce bills.

Our advice is where it is **practically possible**, people should avoid leaving appliances such as washing machines, tumble dryers or dishwashers running unattended overnight.

If you have to run your appliances overnight it is imperative to follow the safety advice to reduce the risk of a fire:

- Make sure your home is fitted with working smoke alarms and test them regularly
- [Register your appliances](#) with the manufacturer – even if they are older or second hand
- Don't overload your plug sockets as this can lead to overheating
- Clean all filters regularly as per the manufacturer's instructions
- Check the cables and plugs of your appliances for any signs of wear and tear
- If you're concerned about an appliance in your home, use [Electrical Safety First's online product checker](#) to see if has been recalled
- If you think there might be a problem with your appliance, unplug it and contact the retailer, manufacturer or a qualified repair technician as appropriate

These simple checks could save your life

It's important that people who are **not** on a time of use tariff don't run appliances unattended at night – electricity is not cheaper for them – it's a misconception not helped by recent social media posts with false information.

Electric blankets

Electric blanket advice is standard fire safety messaging and should include how to store and use safely, looking for defects, what to look for when buying.

If possible, FRSs could also look to run electric blanket safety checks in communities. This could be combined with partner activities to help communities for example at foodbanks, energy advice or debt clinics.

Suggested social media messaging

If your home is on a 'time of use' tariff, if possible, avoid running white goods and charging devices when you are out or asleep. If a fire happens you will have less time to react and escape safely #StayFireSafe

Electricity costs the same no matter what time of day or night you use it - unless you have a time of use tariff. Don't run white goods or charge items if you are asleep thinking you will save money. If a fire happens you will have less time to react and escape #StayFireSafe

Online Marketplaces do not have to adhere to the same safety standard as high street retailers. Buy from websites of brands you trust #StayFireSafe

Have you bought a plug-in device which claims to save you money on energy from an online marketplace or social media? You might have bought a dangerous device which won't save you energy #StayFireSafe

Don't have drinks or use a hot water bottle when using your electric blanket. Liquids and electricity don't mix #StayFireSafe



Bypassing electric and gas meters

NFCC will be working with Crimestoppers as we anticipate this is an area where cost of living could see an increase in people attempting to bypass both gas and electric meters.

The campaign and resources to support this can be found on the dedicated campaign website [Stay Energy Safe](#)

The resources include content to highlight the dangers on this behaviour and this element should be used in messaging to discourage people from attempting this. The resources include information for tenants to spot the signs of bypassing by landlords.

[Energy Theft: A Guide for Tenants in 2022](#)

[Energy Theft: A Guide for Students in 2022](#)

[Consequences of Not Reporting Energy Theft](#)

[How to spot the signs](#)



Figure
1 <https://www.youtube.com/embed/bBztdVrznY8?feature=oembed>

Fire service staff can anonymously report a suspected tampered meter 0800 023 2777. Looking for the signs and knowing how to report can be useful for protection staff as this activity is as likely to happen in a commercial property as a residential.

Suggested social media messages

Energy theft is not a victimless crime. The potential dangers of meter tampering include sparks, fires, damage to property, explosions and, tragically, sometimes fatalities #StayFireSafe <https://youtu.be/umNsU2b-47M>



Tobacco use

People may be more likely to smoke in and around the home as they go out less, this may be combined with more alcohol consumption at home rather than going out.

There may be a risk of people trying to save money on tobacco products which could lead to a rise in illicit tobacco products.

Smoking prevalence is not equal across all socio-economic groups. This is a point that should be considered in targeting prevention activity and advice around smoking. Lower income households have higher rates and face more barriers to making a quit attempt. So those people already on low incomes could struggle even more to make quit attempts, especially if their situation worsens and smoking becomes an increasingly important coping mechanism/crutch/pleasure. Additionally, there is potential that more people, including young people, could take up smoking to cope with the economic crisis they find themselves in.

[Smoking: Low income households \(ash.org.uk\)](https://www.ash.org.uk)

In England

- [Find stop smoking services in England](#)
- Call the free Smokefree National Helpline on 0300 123 1044

In Scotland

- [Find stop smoking services in Scotland](#)
- Call the free Smokeline on 0800 84 84 84

In Wales

- [Find stop smoking services in Wales](#)
- Call the free Help Me Quit helpline on 0800 085 2219

In Northern Ireland

- [Find stop smoking services in NI](#)
- Call a provider in the town or city where you live (telephone numbers can be found on the [Want2Stop](#) website)

Suggested social media messages

The best way to prevent smoking related fires is to quit smoking. But if you're not ready yet follow our safety advice to reduce your risk of fire #StayFireSafe

Smoking is the biggest cause of fire fatalities in the home. Those at greatest risk are older, vulnerable or have mobility problems. Help reduce these preventable deaths by quitting smoking. If you or a loved one does smoke our online safety check can give you advice to #StayFireSafe www.ohfsc.co.uk

Smoking is the number one cause of accidental fire deaths in the UK. If you smoke at home it's safer to smoke outside if you can #StayFireSafe

Never smoke in bed or in a chair where you might fall asleep #StayFireSafe

If you're spending more time in fewer rooms and you choose to smoke indoors regularly empty ashtrays, make sure they can't be knocked over and keep smoking materials away from anything that could catch fire #StayFireSafe

If you're not ready to quit smoking don't be tempted to save money by buying counterfeit cigarettes. They increase the risk of fire #StayFireSafe <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKXoEJ4OrSo>



[Link to video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKXoEJ4OrSo)

Cooking

As people look to save money on cooking the use of unsafe methods of cooking may be more prevalent in the home. There may also be a decrease in people using the oven to cook and whilst this may often mean turning to products such as air fryers and slow cookers for some people this could include an increase in the use of chip pans, woks and other more dated and dangerous means.

Suggested social media messaging

It might be tempting to use a camping stove or barbecue indoors but remember these products must only be used outdoors. Indoors they are a carbon monoxide and fire risk #StayFireSafe

Barbecues, including disposable must not be used on a balcony. They pose a carbon monoxide and fire risk #StayFireSafe

Whether you have a gas or charcoal barbecue remember they must never be used indoors. Protect yourself from carbon monoxide poisoning #StayFireSafe



Candles

There have been reports of people using candles to cook but the main risk is we expect an increase in the use of candles used for lighting. This could mean people lighting more candles in spaces as the primary source of light if people want to avoid turning lights on particularly if media reports or potential enforced blackouts do happen.

Suggested social media messaging

If you're having to use candles for light make sure you put them in a suitable holder and away from materials that may catch fire such as curtains and other fabrics #StayFireSafe

When using candles don't forget how many you have lit. Never leave lit candles unattended and make sure they are all out completely at night or when you go out #StayFireSafe

If you're using candles more, you may have more lighters and matches to hand. Don't forget to keep them out of reach of children #StayFireSafe

Place lit candles out of reach of children and pets. Make sure they can't be knocked over by children or pets #StayFireSafe

Lit candles can easily set fire to loose clothing or hair. Remember if clothing should catch fire Stop, Drop and Roll #StayFireSafe



Hot wax can burn. Never move lit or recently extinguished candles and keep away from children #StayFireSafe

Avoid using candles if you are feeling tired or have been drinking alcohol. It's easy to fall asleep and leave them lit. They can easily start a fire #StayFireSafe

Don't move or carry lit candles. It's much safer to use an LED candle or torch to light your way #StayFireSafe

Using candles can increase fire risk. It much safer to look for brighter and safer alternatives. LED candles and lights, battery or wind-up torches are just some of the products that are safer to light your home #StayFireSafe

Signposting

There may be many local initiatives which FRSs can point their communities to. This can range from debt management, energy advice and food banks. Fire and rescue services should work with partners and local authorities to promote and signpost people to where they can find help in the community.

Nationally the main places where people can look for advice are

Citizens Advice - <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/debt-and-money/get-help-with-the-cost-of-living/>

Get in touch with your local Citizens Advice and see if any support or advice lines local authorities or fire services have can be included on their webpages.

Ask people to see if their energy supplier has any help see **Could you be missing out on free lifesaving gas safety check for your home?** As an example.

Government information (this will potentially update and change as government address the situation)

<https://helpforhouseholds.campaign.gov.uk/>

Available grants for people such as

<https://grants-search.turn2us.org.uk/>

NEA

<https://www.nea.org.uk/get-help/>

Shelter

https://england.shelter.org.uk/get_help

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Essex County Fire and Rescue Service – Risk based HFSC revisits

Following a review of fatal fires, partnership intelligence, post COVID impacts and the emerging risk of the cost of living rise, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service is implementing a programme of re-visits for Gold (higher risk) and Silver (medium risk) Home Fire Safety Visits.



Essex Review of Risk

Current Picture

- Stations Visits: Bronze Targeted via ADF Model - Allocated via CFRMIS

New Approach: Risk Based Approach Ref Silver & Gold Revisit + Bronze Visits

- ECFRS Recognise the Risk Profile of residents is changing following: Post Covid / Cost of Living / Fatal Fires Report / Partnership Intelligence – Risk is increasing
- **Sum :** **Data & intelligence = Increase in fire deaths + Safeguarding referral + pressures on partners x Cost of Living Crisis**
- **Likelihood** Risk of Gold increasing + Silver Transitioning to Gold
- **Evaluation:** Risk Profile / Behaviours / Referrals – identify how risk profile has changed
- **Data Range:** 2017 -2019



Analysing data from 2017 to 2019, they are implementing a programme of revisits based on risk information to identify how lifestyles have changed or if risk profiles have altered. They are looking to establish if people's risk has increased. For example, residents that were graded as Silver Group, may now have increased to Gold. Potentially they would need any further interventions or advice from FRS or our partners.

The revisits will be allocated to Operational Crews to deliver in addition to normal risk-based Home Fire Safety Checks.

Illustrative Case studies

Below are some of the examples provided by FRSs of the recent impact of energy costs on fire safety and in particular on vulnerable people.

Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service Case 1

NFRS received a public protection notice concern from police after they completed a welfare check on a resident. During that police officers found the occupier was using coal on a tray to act as a BBQ to cook his food as he had no electric in the property.

This was local authority housing stock and so NFRS worked with the housing provider who confirmed that the occupier had accrued debts already for gas and electric and had therefore had a pre-payment meter fitted.

The occupier stated that they could not afford the meter and seemed to have no key in order to use it. As a result, they had been without gas, electric and therefore hot water for many weeks and so were being creative in the way they were heating food.

The occupier lived alone, had reduced mobility and was a smoker so already considered to be at higher risk from fire.

Though he did not want to consent to a Home Fire Safety Check, NFRS were able to support the case for further support from the housing provider and the occupier's utilities were reinstated, and additional support accessed to improve his standard of living and quality of life. A positive outcome but indicative of the desperation some people are feeling in relation to their bills.

Case 2

A NFRS crew attended the property following reports of an electrical fire. They found the occupier was using a camping stove to attempt to generate her own electricity.

There were numerous holes in the walls of the property with exposed wiring that had been cut and neighbours also reported that the occupier had destroyed the electric box.

Crews believed the occupier was suffering from extreme anxiety and had wanted to disconnect the electricity completely to avoid not just the fuel costs but the standing costs.

The property was poorly presented, indicating further concerns for the occupier's health and wellbeing and ongoing referrals were made to provide support with community mental health assessment and support.

Due to the presentation of the property and the concerns raised, police who were in attendance considered whether there was potential for a charge of arson with intent. However, this was not taken forward given the vulnerabilities of the occupier.

London Fire Brigade

London Fire Brigade issued an urgent safety warning following a recent fire in southwest London as rising energy bills hit UK homes.

Fire Investigators determined that the cause of a significant house fire in New Malden involved an open fire being used instead of gas central heating. With more than 100 fires involving open fires, log burners and heaters in just the last few months alone, the Brigade fears that costly energy bills could result in a surge of fires as people resort to alternative means to heat their homes throughout the colder spells of the year.

The blaze, which started on Kingston Road at the end of April, is understood to have been caused by combustible items too close to an open fire. The fire was discovered by the resident who had been burning timber on an open fire in his living room to heat his home. He was taken to hospital and the property sustained significant damage.

[See the full release here](#)

NFCC is keen for any case studies where a fire incident can be linked to cost of living. Please get in touch
Communications@nationalfirechiefs.org.uk