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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 deaths avoidable? – Yes. The issues need urgent consideration and action by care home

Registered Managers, nominated individuals and care teams, 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 to remove or reduce the risk.

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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.

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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.

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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. 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 user is smoking. The individual's bedding and clothing can also become impregnated with cream, increasing flammability and the risk to the user.

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Following recent fire deaths, coroners have 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 its likelihood of occurring. <http://www.nrls.npsa.nhs.uk/patient-safety-videos/paraffin-based-skin-products/>

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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 for items to be laundered at the correct temperature.

This is the responsibility of the care home owing a duty of care for the health, safety and wellbeing of individuals who may be at heightened risk.



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Questions to consider

Is the individual a smoker?
Are emollients being applied? Does this product contain paraffin? If Yes?
Share the risks with:
Individuals
GP/Nurse Prescriber
Family member
ACT; CONSIDER AN ALTERNATIVE PRODUCT