



Position Statement

NFCC Smoking, Vaping and Tobacco Position Statements

September 2017

The NFCC is committed to making people safer utilising the skills, knowledge and experience of the Fire & Rescue Service (FRS), along with quality partnership working. Fires caused by smoking materials result in more deaths than any other type of fire. This is despite the overall number of cigarette smokers falling.

Over recent years there have been both regulatory and cultural changes regarding smoking e.g. the introduction of smokefree laws in England in 2007, improved safety standards, availability and willingness to buy illegal tobacco products, decreased smoking prevalence, and the increased use of personal vaporisers, together with a growth in the prevalence of Shisha establishments.

As a result of a combination of factors, such as the introduction of the Health Act 2006 and the EU Tobacco Products Directive, Local Authorities are now signing up for the Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control. With shrinking public service budgets there is an increased appetite for collaborative working between the FRS, partners and local communities to tackle tobacco and smoking related issues. The underlying and key driver behind these initiatives is to reduce smoking prevalence and the number of smoking related fires, injuries and fatalities, improve health and wellbeing, and tackle health inequalities.

Despite these activities, partners and the public, although generally well informed of the health risks, remain unaware of fire risk and smoking and smoking materials still account for the highest percentage of accidental fire deaths. There is a continuing need for education and continued work to reduce smoking prevalence along with all its associated risks.

Vaping and personal vaporisers

Many terms have been associated with devices designed to harness battery energy to heat a solution to produce vapours, which are then inhaled. Terms include Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS), e-cigarettes, vape pens, cig-a-likes and personal vaporisers. Vaping is now the common term used for the act of using these products. The NFCC acknowledges the need for common terminology and has adopted the term vaping for the use of the products, and personal vaporisers for the equipment used. Statistics show that there are over 8m adult smokers in the UK.¹

There are an estimated 2.9m adult vapers in Britain, almost all of whom are smokers and ex-smokers.² In March 2016 it was reported that there were 113 fires caused by e-cigarettes in three years. IRS data shows that there have been over 16,000 smoking related fires over the same period. These figures indicate the higher risks associated with smoking. An expert independent evidence review published by Public Health England (PHE) concluded that vaping devices are significantly less harmful to health than cigarettes and have the potential to help smokers quit smoking.³

¹<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/bulletins/adultsmokinghabitsingreatbritain/2015>

²<http://ash.org.uk/information-and-resources/fact-sheets/use-of-electronic-cigarettes-vapourisers-among-adults-in-great-britain/>

³<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/e-cigarettes-an-evidence-update>

This evidence was also supported by a report published by the Royal College of Physicians in April 2016.⁴ Vaping devices are the safer option from both a health and fire perspective. FRSs agree that smoking cessation is the most effective method of reducing fires caused by smoking and smoking materials. Some FRSs are now supporting vaping as a safer alternative to smoking where people are unable or unwilling to quit nicotine use, especially for those at highest risk from fire i.e. those who are immobile, who smoke in bed and risk dropping lit cigarettes onto their bedding/clothing.

With effect from May 2017, vaping devices are tightly regulated in the UK for quality and safety under the Tobacco and Related Products Regulations 2016.

Key messages for vaping include safety messages for all rechargeable electronic devices:

- Buy products from reputable dealers.
- Only use chargers designed for use with the specific device. Some chargers may overcharge the product, leading to an increased risk of fire.
- Never leave a vaping device charging unattended, and never leave them charging overnight – especially next to your bed.
- Never use a vaping device close to medical oxygen, flammable emollient creams or airflow mattresses.
- Do not buy counterfeit goods as batteries and/or chargers are unlikely to have overcurrent protection and could lead to batteries exploding.
- Never modify or adapt personal vaporisers and their associated kit
- Never use damaged equipment or batteries

Fire is not the only risk posed by vaping products and the liquid they contain can be highly toxic. RoSPA offer the following advice;

Babies and toddlers are inquisitive and learn about the world by putting things in their mouth. There is a risk of poisoning from e-cigarette liquid and, as with medicines and cleaning products, e-cigarettes and e-liquids should be kept out of the reach of children.

Further advice can be found at: <https://www.rospa.com/home-safety/advice/product/vaping/>

Fire Safer Cigarettes and illegal tobacco

Since 2005 a coalition of organisations including the NFCC, UK Fire Services and Health and Tobacco Control groups called for the introduction of a fire safer standard for cigarettes in Europe. These standards were introduced in November 2011. Although fire safer cigarettes reduce the risk of a lit cigarette causing a fire when left unattended (they are designed to self extinguish if not smoked) they do not remove the fire risk.

FRSs nationally have raised concerns over the trade in illegal tobacco as it is unlikely that cigarettes which are illegally manufactured and traded will comply with fire safety standards. FRSs have reported that collation of evidence for Fire Investigation purposes is difficult, as it is often not possible to prove that tobacco products are counterfeit and/or illegal, currently there is no option to capture detail of incidents involving fire safer cigarettes on IRS.

Shisha

Increased use of Shisha in some areas has led to a rise in the numbers of Shisha establishments; however, ascertaining the number of fires involving these establishments is difficult as they are often recorded as cafes, restaurants or bars. Evidence from fire safety regulatory departments has highlighted comparatively high instances of non-compliance with legislation, resulting in increased fire risk. Incidents at these types of establishments have involved both careless disposal of smoking materials and carbon monoxide poisoning (through lack of ventilation or management of fuel).

⁴<https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/nicotine-without-smoke-tobacco-harm-reduction-0>

There is a need to gather consistent data on incidents within Shisha establishments and educate those in control of these premises, their users and partners to the fire and carbon monoxide risks.

Smoking and Health Equipment

Some health equipment when brought into contact with smoking materials considerably increase the speed of fire growth and in some cases, presents a risk of explosion. Equipment identified through examination of fire data includes; flammable emollient creams, incontinence pads (in local storage and in use), airflow pressure relieving mattresses and oxygen therapy cylinders.

Despite consistent work by FRSs to educate care and health partners to the risk there is more to do to reduce the opportunity for cigarettes to come into contact with these items.

England ✓

Wales ✓

Scotland ✓

Northern Ireland ✓

We will:

- Understand the fire risks associated with smoking in all its forms and promote clear messages to our partners and the public in order to reduce smoking related risk.
- Actively encourage all FRS to support vaping as a safer alternative to smoking and amend their messaging to reflect this.
- Actively participate in tobacco control approaches and provide clarity to partners about our role in tobacco alliance or partnership approaches in reducing smoking rates and tackling health inequalities.
- Support partners in work to reduce the fire risks associated with smoking in all its forms.
- We will support partners to reduce smoking rates through a collaborative approach to smoking cessation.
- Provide clear messages and campaign to improve awareness amongst partner agencies of the fire risks associated with smoking and smoking materials, and how some health equipment such as flammable emollient cream, oxygen use and air flow mattresses contribute to fire risk.
- Support improvements to vaping battery, charger and device safety standards through our electrical safety work.
- Work with Trading Standards and Police to support the identification of illegal cigarettes and/or unsafe products and support partner's enforcement action to improve safety.
- Work to improve the level of detail captured around smoking risks, such as whether the fire was caused by an e-cigarette, or by a non fire safer cigarette.
- Promote safety messages around the safe operation of Shisha establishments and promote the accurate identification and recording of Shisha premises.