



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE**  
**FIRE AND RESCUE**

Dear Care Home Provider,

## **Emollients, potential fire risks and person-centred risk assessments**

We know emollients are widely used and are important for the treatment of skin conditions such as eczema, psoriasis and bed sores - and we support their continued use.

However, scientific testing by Anglia Ruskin University has shown that fabric - such as clothing, towelling, bandages or bedding - contaminated with emollients containing paraffin, and also emollients which contain no paraffin, such as those made with natural oils burn quicker and hotter than fabric which has not been contaminated. The tests showed the average time to ignition is approximately 6 seconds. Testing also demonstrated regular washing of fabrics does not totally remove the risk.

Since 2010, there have been 56 fire fatalities confirmed in the UK where emollients are thought to have been involved in the rapid development of the fire. All the people who died were older, many had restricted mobility and a number had care plans in place. In 79% of these fatalities, smoking materials such as matches, lighters and cigarettes were found to be the ignition source of the fire.

### **What this means for you?**

Due to the potential fire risk outlined above you should, as part of the individual person-centred risk assessments you carry out, give greater consideration to **reduce or mitigate the risks of a fire** arising and assess the risk of harm to that person if a fire occurs.

We also recommend you consider the following as part of the overall risk assessment on your premises (See over for further information)

- Ensure your staff are informed and kept regularly updated about the potential fire risks of emollients, especially when used by smokers, so that they can monitor and review individual risk assessments effectively and report as appropriate.
- Inform and train staff about appropriate emergency procedures should a fire occur.
- Ensure any previously contaminated towelling and bedding, that has been laundered and tumble dried, is cooled prior to folding for storage.

If you are unclear on these points or have any further queries please contact:

[fire.safety@dwfire.org.uk](mailto:fire.safety@dwfire.org.uk)



## Further information - Regulatory law

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have stated that although paraffin-based emollients are not dangerous substances as defined in Regulation 2(a) of Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations 2002, it is the way they are used which brings them into the scope of regulation 2(b) – see below i.e. **when the emollient dries into fabric it would be highly flammable if an ignition source is introduced.**

*Regulation 2(a). A substance or preparation which meets the criteria in the approved classification and labelling guide for classification as a substance or preparation which is explosive, oxidising, extremely flammable, highly flammable or flammable, whether or not that substance or preparation is classified under the CHIP Regulations;*

*Regulation 2(b). A substance or preparation which because of its physico-chemical or chemical properties **and the way it is used** or is present at the workplace creates a risk, not being a substance or preparation falling within subparagraph (a) above.*

This is also covered in The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005<sup>1</sup> which states

**12.(1)** *Where a dangerous substance<sup>2</sup> is present in or on the premises, the responsible person must ensure that risk to relevant persons related to the presence of the substance is either eliminated or reduced so far as is reasonably practicable.*

**12. (3)** *Where it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate risk pursuant to paragraphs (1) and (2), the responsible person must, so far as is reasonably practicable, apply measures consistent with the risk assessment and appropriate to the nature of the activity or operation, including the measures specified in Part 4 of Schedule 1 to this Order to—*

*(a) control the risk, and*

*(b) mitigate the detrimental effects of a fire.*

**12. (4)** *The responsible person must—*

*(a) arrange for the safe handling, storage and transport of dangerous substances and waste containing dangerous substances; and*

*(b) ensure that any conditions necessary pursuant to this Order for ensuring the **elimination or reduction of risk are maintained.***

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<sup>1</sup> Part 2 Fire Safety Duties; Article 12 Elimination or reduction of risks from dangerous substances

<sup>2</sup> A 'dangerous substance' is defined in Part 1 General, Article 2 Interpretation