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Update on work relating to fire safer cigarettes

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Addressed to:

**The Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority
The Chief Executive of the County Council
The Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Authority
The Clerk to the Combined Fire and Rescue Authority
The Commissioner of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority
The Chief Fire Officer**

Please forward to:

Summary

This Circular provides background on fire safer cigarettes (also known as Reduced Ignition Propensity (RIP) cigarettes) and work that is taking place to create a European Standard.

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1.0 Fire statistics

1.1 Fire statistics show an overall downward trend in accidental fires and deaths and the lowest number of fire deaths since 1959 for the UK. The average number of deaths per year over the seven year period from 1999/2000 is 274 which is 20% lower than the fatality levels of the mid to late 1990s. The total number of fatal casualties from accidental fires in dwellings in the UK has dropped 36% from 481 in 1995 to 310 in 2005. Smoking materials are the greatest source of ignition for fatal accidental fires in dwellings, accounting for an average of 32% of fatal fires between 1995 and 2005¹.

2.0 Fire safer cigarettes

2.1 For some time now, the cigarette manufacturers have had the technology to make cigarettes fire safer (by reducing the ignition propensity). A common technique used to create fire safer cigarettes is to wrap the stem of cigarettes with two or three thin bands of less-porous paper that act as 'speed humps' to slow down a burning cigarette. If a fire safer cigarette is left unattended, the burning tobacco will reach one of these speed humps and self-extinguish.

2.2 Fire safer cigarette products have been introduced into the markets of several countries, including the United States, where 22 states have passed, or are in the process of passing, legislation to require that cigarettes sold and manufactured in the state meet a national cigarette fire-safety standard. On 1 October 2005, Canada became the first country to implement a cigarette fire-safety standard at a national level. And in March 2007, Australia released its own standard based on the US standard. However, in the EU there is no current standard and no legislation requiring that cigarettes sold and manufactured in nation states meet any fire-safety standard.

3.0 Experience of and research into fire safer cigarettes

3.1 New York State was the first US state to adopt a fire safer standard in 2004. It is too early to draw too many conclusions from their experience, however fire deaths have dropped from 38 in 2003 to 33 in 2005. Whilst it is not possible to directly attribute the fall to the introduction of the new legislation, it is nonetheless encouraging.

3.2 In Canada, prior to the Standard being introduced, the Government published its Impact Assessment which provided a best and worse case scenario. The Canadian impact assessment assumed a 68% reduction in fires/casualties; the worst case scenario reduced this by half, to 34%. Applying the Canadian Regulatory Impact Assessment to the 2005 UK fire statistics would have meant 2,116 fewer fires, 731 injuries prevented and potentially 75 lives saved. A further positive impact would also be a reduced risk to firefighters attending fewer dangerous fire incidents.

3.3 CLG undertook some research into the comparisons of the propensity of fire-safer cigarettes and conventional cigarettes to ignite textile materials used in a domestic environment. The CLG research estimated that had cigarettes in the UK conformed to the New York standard in 2003, the number of smoking-related fires would have been reduced in that year by nearly two thirds.

¹ Fire Statistics United Kingdom, 2005

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4.0 Work in Europe

- 4.1 At the request of the UK Government, supported by Sweden, the European Commission's General Product Safety Committee (GPSD) undertook to look into the case for developing an appropriate technical standard for fire-safer cigarettes. Over the past eighteen months or so the Committee has discussed the issue, gathering evidence from member states to underpin the requirement to create a European Standard.
- 4.2 In parallel, Fire and Rescue Services have championed the introduction of fire safer cigarettes. CFOA along with many individual Fire Authorities, the FBU, FOA and many other organisations with an interest in fire safety have come together to lobby under the banner of the RIP Coalition. The lobbying has contributed to raising awareness of this matter in many quarters.

5.0 Moving towards a European Standard

- 5.1 On the 29th November 2007, the EU member states overwhelmingly endorsed the EC plans to draw up proposals for a European standard for fire-safer cigarettes. The Commission has therefore instructed the European Standards body (CEN) to develop a harmonised technical standard on the lines indicated in the mandate.
- 5.2 The process to create a European Standard will take some time - up to three years. The Technical Committee which will do this work will use the existing American Standard as a starting point with a view to building on previous experience and not 'reinventing the wheel'. The UK, through the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisors Unit, will be heavily involved in this work.
- 5.3 Once the standard is finalised, the next steps will be for it to be referenced in the Official Journal of the EU. In essence, this means manufacturers can voluntarily comply with the standard. However, the Commission will push to have standard recognised and used as the industry norm.
- 5.4 If the standardization goes smoothly then the Commission may decide that the Standard should become part of regulation in some way, either in a dedicated Directive or Regulation or a Commission decision.

6.0 Work in the UK

- 6.1 We are considering what work we can usefully do whilst the Technical Committee develops the European Standard. Ministers have agreed to officials developing a consultation document to explore the views of stakeholders on the introduction of UK legislation in anticipation of the Standard. This work will commence in 2008. We will of course be consulting with Fire and Rescue Services as part of this process.

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Fire Policy