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This circular is	Relevant to the National Framework		
Status	This Circular sets out current thinking about age restrictions for the sale of matches and lighters and the corresponding evidence base.		

Developing the case for setting age restrictions for sale of matches and lighters

Issued by:

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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:

Heads of Community Fire Safety

Summary

This Circular sets out current thinking about age restrictions on the sale of matches and lighters, and the corresponding evidence base. Identifying the lack of information about deliberate secondary fires, this Circular asks fire and rescue services to provide data and evidence about young people setting secondary fires and what the source of ignition for those fires might be.

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Developing the case for setting age restrictions for sale of matches and lighters

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 When used by responsible adults, matches and lighters are safe products, but in the hands of children and juveniles these products can be dangerous and can be used to cause injury and damage to property. You will be aware of tragic cases of domestic fire deaths and there is good evidence for primary fires, as set out below. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence from fire and rescue services has revealed that some juveniles are playing with fire and using matches and lighters for anti-social purposes. Of course, a child who is sufficiently determined to obtain a source of fire can undoubtedly find matches and lighters in their own homes, but they are also legally able to buy them from shops.
- 1.2 There is no minimum age for selling matches and lighters to children and juveniles. This is in contrast to age restrictions which apply to aerosols, knives, and of course cigarettes.
- 1.3 The Department is therefore considering the case for setting a minimum age for selling matches and lighters to minors. To do this we need better data on secondary fires.

2.0 Levers for reducing deliberate fires set by young people

- 2.1 In the light of the recent publication of the Department of Health's 'Consultation on the future of tobacco control', we believe it is timely to build a case for including age restrictions on the sale of matches and lighters. This would have the dual effect of both deterring their sale to the under 18s for the purposes of smoking, and for anti-social behaviour such as fire-setting.
- 2.2 The issue of age restrictions for the sale of matches and lighters was absent from the consultation document. However, we believe that there is real merit - both in terms of health outcomes and fire safety outcomes - in considering this issue in more detail, but we need better evidence in order to do so.
- 2.3 Separately, we would encourage fire and rescue services to respond to the Department of Health's consultation by 8 September to indicate levels of support for fire safer cigarettes and other measures set out in the document. You may also consider including in your response to the Consultation that there is currently no age restriction for selling matches and lighters to minors, products which are used predominantly for smoking purposes. The link below refers: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_085114.

3.0 Background: Deliberate primary fires statistics

- 3.1 UK fire and rescue service statistics show that the number of deliberate primary fires in the UK continues to decline. In 2006, 72,545 fires were reported against 84,626 in 1994. This is a decrease of 14% over the twelve year period.
- 3.2 Over the same twelve year period, the number of fires set by young people under the age of 18 has dropped from 28,271 to 17,646. This is a more extensive decrease of 38%. The age of the fire-starter is often unknown and unrecorded on the FDR1 forms, so this figure may well show an under-representation of the actual situation.
- 3.3 Both of these sets of figures show a pleasing downward trend, with the trend for deliberate fires set by young people decreasing more steeply than the overall numbers. However, we are concerned to see a less marked decrease in the percentage of young people being responsible for setting deliberate primary fires. In 1994, 33% of these fires were set by young people under the age of 18. Over the same period, this has now only dropped to 24%.
- 3.4 We would like to see a steeper decrease in the percentage of overall deliberate primary fires set by young people under 18.

- 3.5** Furthermore, we have looked in more detail at the data for the type of fires that are set by young people under 18 and have discovered that in 1994 there was a fairly even balance of fires in dwellings (21%), other buildings (35%) and vehicle fires (30%); but this diverges over the next few years, with a peak in 2001 for vehicle fires of 54% against a low of 14% for dwelling fires. In 2006 the figures show that dwelling fires have stabilised at around 15% but vehicle fires have only gone down a small amount to 47%. Over the twelve year period dwelling fires decreased by 55%, other building fires decreased by 58% and vehicle fires only decreased by 4%. It is no surprise that vehicle fires dominate, but disappointing to note the downward trend only started in 2001 unlike the other figures. Factors such as the price of scrap metal, the End of Vehicle Life Regulations 2003 and the work of the Arson Control Forum will of course have contributed to this decline.
- 3.6** We have looked at the evidence of sources of ignition for primary deliberate fires set by young people under 18. In 1994, matches were the source of ignition in 60% of deliberate primary fires set by young people under the age of 18. Adding lighters in causes the numbers to increase to 64%. Twelve years later, the overall number of fires where matches and lighters are the source of ignition is down to 57%, but the proportion of those fires which were started with a lighter increased to 16% against 4% in 1994. Interestingly, the trend for matches to be the source of ignition is steeply downwards, with a 56% decrease; whereas the usage of lighters has shot up by 155%. This mirrors a similar trend with lighted paper/material as the source of ignition.

4.0 Collecting data on secondary fires

- 4.1** In contrast to the data for primary deliberate fires, which we hold centrally, sourced from FDR1 forms, we have very little data about deliberate secondary fires. We collect aggregate figures for secondary fires in derelict buildings, grassland, heathland etc., and refuse and derelict vehicles (and the catch-all 'other' category) but we do not collect data on the age of the fire-setter.
- 4.2** For the purposes of this work, we would like to collect, as a one-off exercise, the same level of data for deliberate secondary fires as we hold centrally for deliberate primary fires.
- 4.3** We don't expect to get a complete picture, but would like to ask fire and rescue services to provide us with as much data as possible on deliberate secondary fires set by young people under 18. In particular we are looking for data on numbers of:
- Deliberate secondary fires set by young people under 18
 - Deliberate secondary fires set by young people aged 0 – 9
 - Deliberate secondary fires set by young people aged 10 - 17
 - Deliberate secondary fires set by young people under 18 by location
 - Deliberate secondary fires set by young people under 18 by source of ignition
- 4.4** We are not providing a pro forma on this occasion as we are unsure how your data is held. We would be grateful for data in whatever format you have. We would also welcome any evidence you may have that people under 18 have purchased matches and lighters and then used the products to set secondary fires. Annex A provides, for information, centrally held data for primary fires set by age group.

5.0 Data returns

- 5.1 Please send your data to me by **22 August**. This will give us time to analyse the data and use it to inform our response to the Department of Health's consultation in time for their deadline for responses of 8 September. We will provide an update in due course to keep you informed about progress on this important matter.

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