



10 January 2018

Dear Health Care Professional

**USING PARAFFIN- BASED CREAMS SAFELY
ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR GENERAL PRACTITIONERS AND PRACTICE NURSES**

A Freedom of Information request from BBC 5 Live programme earlier this year has highlighted that there have been 37 deaths linked to paraffin-based creams in the UK within the last 7 years. Only 6 out of 53 fire and rescue services answered the request, so it is not known what the actual figure is, however, it is probable that it is much higher. In West Yorkshire, there have been 3 deaths from fire attributable to the use of creams within the last 5 years, all of which were people who used such creams and smoked.

Following a recent fire death in West Yorkshire, the HM Coroner has noted that health care professionals 'may not be aware of the potential fire hazard posed by emollient creams which contain a **lower** level of paraffin'¹. The fire risk associated with the use of paraffin-based creams was previously only thought to be evident in creams with a base of >50% base paraffin. Recent fatal fire incident investigations have identified that the use of creams with <50% base paraffin can contribute to rapid fire spread when exposed to an ignition source.

West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service is running a campaign to highlight the potential fire hazards and risks for people when using paraffin-based creams (which permeate dressings, clothing and bedding), particularly when close to ignition sources such as smoking, cooking and open flames. As part of this campaign we are contacting you, the health professionals, to remind you about the flammability of these creams so that you can urgently advise your patients and help to prevent any further injuries or loss of life from this cause.

What you can do to help

We would like you to help us reduce the risk of serious injury or death from fire to your patients by:

- ♦ Considering their **smoking status prior to prescribing** paraffin-based creams;
- ♦ **Talking** to your patients about the potential fire risks of using these creams;
- ♦ Consider **alternative** treatments where people smoke **and/or** have a condition which places them at high risk of fire such as memory loss, poor concentration or drowsiness;
- ♦ **Reviewing** a patient's use of paraffin-based creams if they have a previous history of smoking and are displaying memory issues and/or confusion;
- ♦ **Sharing** this information with your colleagues and teams;
- ♦ Displaying and **disseminating** leaflets and other appropriate information to your patients.

If you have any further ideas or suggestions, about how we can work together to ensure people stay safe and well within their homes, please contact Claire Tabert in our Central Prevention team on 0113 387 5731.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dave Walton'.

Dave Walton
Deputy Chief Fire Officer

**NPSA Rapid Response Report 4:
Fire Hazard with Paraffin Based Skin Products on Dressings and Clothing
Issued 26/11/2007**

To all healthcare staff involved in the prescribing, dispensing or administration of paraffin based skin products of a potential fire hazard.

Bandages, dressings and clothing in contact with paraffin based products, for example White Soft Paraffin, White Soft Paraffin plus 50% Liquid Paraffin or Emulsifying ointment are easily ignited with a naked flame or cigarette.

Further information and supporting materials (poster, patient information leaflet and videos of fire hazard testing) concerning this *Rapid Response Report*, are available at: www.npsa.nhs.uk/health/alerts.

For IMMEDIATE ACTION, by the NHS and the independent sector.

The deadline date for action complete is 26 February 2008

The following actions should apply to all patients in all settings being dispensed, or treated with, large quantities (100g or more) of paraffin based products:

- Information should be given about the potential fire risks of smoking (or being near to people who are smoking), or exposure to any open flame or other potential cause of ignition during treatment; and about regularly changing clothing or bedding impregnated with paraffin based products (preferably on a daily basis) as the paraffin soaks into the fabrics and can potentially be a fire hazard.
- This information should be given on the first occasion that such treatment is prescribed, dispensed or administered by a healthcare professional and a record kept confirming that such advice has been given. A check should be made on subsequent occasions that the advice has been received previously and understood.
- Fire safety information should be displayed prominently in every clinical area where patients may be treated with large quantities of paraffin based products.
- If, against advice, a hospitalised patient intends to leave the ward to smoke, they should be informed of the risk and advised to wear a thick outer covering that has not been contaminated with paraffin based products.
- Relatives or carers should be informed if a patient does not comply with safety advice.