



Merseyside  
FIRE & RESCUE  
SERVICE

Draft  
Annual Fatal Fire Analysis

2004/5

Produced by the Incident  
Investigation Team

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### **APPENDIX**

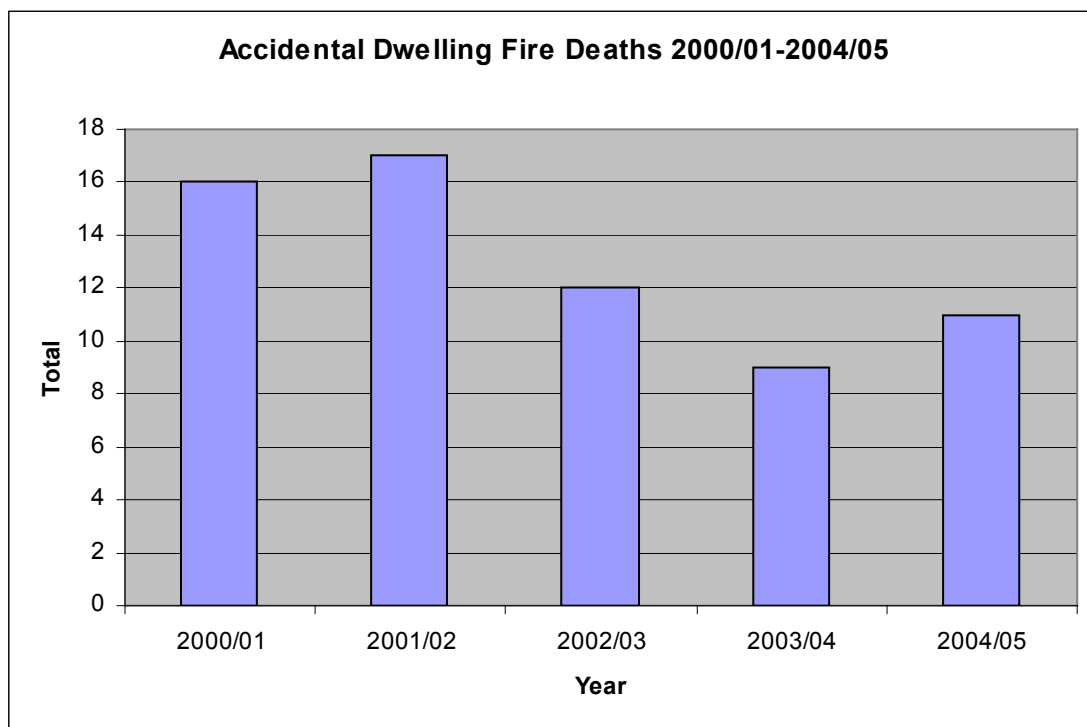
**Selective information from the database**

## **Introduction**

This report is an analysis of the accidental dwelling fire deaths that occurred in Merseyside during the period between April 2004 and March 2005. Whereas the Service attended a total of nineteen fires involving a total of 20 deaths during the reporting period, three of the deaths were the result of suicide by fire, three more were the consequence of deliberate fire setting, two were recorded as being by natural causes and one is being dealt with by the Police as murder leaving a total of 11 accidental dwelling fire deaths on Merseyside in the 12 month period. This is one more than the extremely challenging target of 10 that was set following last year's analysis but still significantly lower than the figures that were experienced prior to the introduction of the pioneering community safety initiatives such as the free Home Fire Safety Checks and provision and installation of smoke alarms.

Although this is a slight increase on the previous year's figure of nine it sustains the overall downward trend and once again demonstrates that the Authority's commitment to driving down fire deaths and injuries through its preventative community safety programme is delivering results.

The following chart demonstrates the current 5-year trend in accidental dwelling fire deaths.

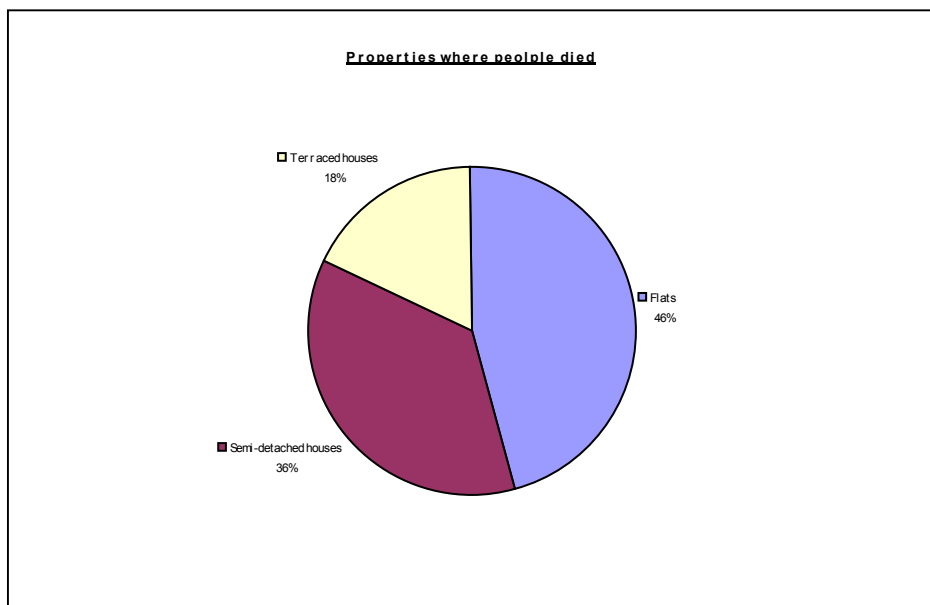


### **Where are people dying?**

Once again all 11 who died in accidental dwelling fires did so in their own home. During the last two reporting periods the majority of accidental fire deaths have occurred in terraced houses but that is not the case for 2004/05. Only two of the deaths, or less than 20%, occurred in terraced property with flats/houses in multiple occupation accounting for almost half of all incidents. The four deaths that occurred in semi-detached houses are the highest in this type of dwelling for some years. The actual types of property where people died were as follows;

- Flats 5 deaths (4 in low rise and 1 high rise)
- Semi-detached houses 4 deaths
- Terraced houses 2 deaths

Of the 11 victims 8 were in the room where the fire started at the time that it started and 3 were elsewhere in the property but on the same floor as the fire.



## **Who died in fires?**

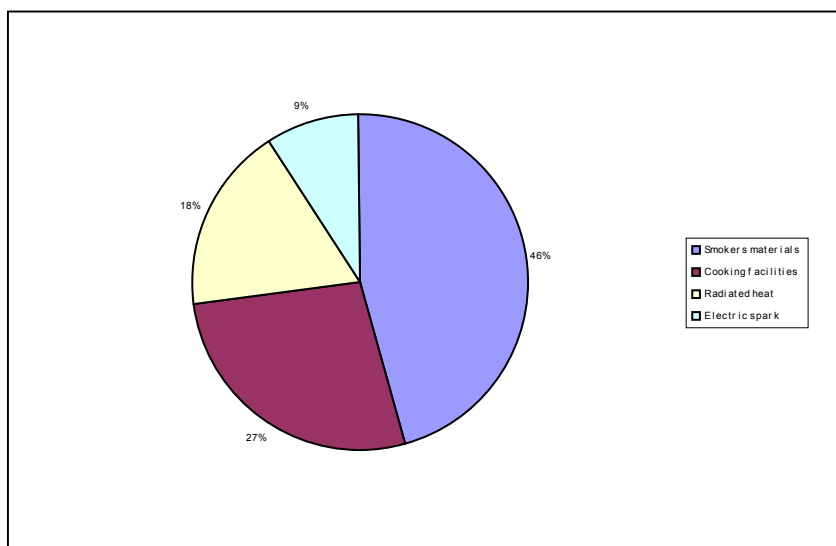
Eight of the 11 people that died in accidental dwelling fires were male and the ages of all that died ranged from 20 to 93 years with the average age of all being 57 years. The average age of the males that died was 49 years, and for females it was 77 years. Once again all of the fire victims were white. Five of all victims (45%) were over the age of 60 years whereas all female that died were in fact aged 72 years or more.

Eight of those that died lived alone and all bar one was alone at the time that the fire occurred.

Surprisingly only two of those that died had a recognised condition that affected their mobility and who relied on walking aids although it is clear that some of the older victims will, by virtue of their age, be likely to have had difficulty when moving around.

## **What were the primary causes of the fires?**

Yet again the major cause of accidental fire deaths was found to be smoking materials, which was the cause of 5 of the fires. These fires were a consequence of accidentally dropped lighted cigarettes or matches, or careless disposal of the same. The careless use of cooking facilities was once again the second most common cause with three of the fires being attributed to this. Two fires were recorded as being the result of radiated heat, one from a free standing halogen heater being too close to combustible items and the other heat from a lit bulb onto which bedding had fallen. The remaining fire was started by an electric spark igniting natural gas that had leaked from a fractured domestic supply pipe.



- Smoking materials/matches – 5 fire deaths or 45%
- Cooking facilities – 3 fire deaths or 27%
- Radiated heat/open fire – 2 fire deaths or 18%

- Electric spark – 1 fire death or 9%

The three primary causes of fire for the past year mirror the same three causes for all fires during the two previous reporting periods.

### **What were the underlying causes of the fires?**

It is not surprising to report that yet again alcohol was considered to be a factor in six (55%) of the fires in which people died. Furthermore, it is not surprising to report that the 6 fires in which alcohol was a factor all involved male deaths, and in particular younger males. The average age of the males that died in the fires where alcohol was a factor was 44 years. In 3 of the 6 fires the victims were thought to be in an alcohol-induced sleep when the fire started, and involved cooking facilities left unattended. This data appears to reinforce the view that was noted in last year's report that the relationship between alcohol and accidental fires is an issue affecting middle aged and younger males.

The only other significant underlying cause of accidental fires was general carelessness and lack of awareness of good fire safety practise in the home particularly surrounding the careful use of smoker's materials, cooking facilities and heating appliances.

### **How many victims had smoke alarms installed?**

There were only three properties where smoke alarms were installed although in one of them the battery had been removed rendering it inoperative. At another incident a single point battery operated detector had also been rendered inoperative by its battery although in place being disconnected. A further mains operated detector elsewhere in the property failed to operate because smoke generated by the fire was confined to the room of origin.

The third property that was provided with smoke alarms was provided with three single point battery operated detectors, including one in the ground floor room where the deceased slept and the fire started, which operated and raised the alarm and alerted neighbours to the fire.

Significantly despite our extensive HFSC programme, eight (73%) of the properties where people died did not have any alarms installed at all.

### **Where did the fires occur?**

All eleven fires started in one of three types of room. They either started in a kitchen, a bedroom or a lounge with a fairly even distribution between them. Four fires started in kitchens although only three were the direct consequence of cooking. The fourth was the result of an electric spark igniting a gas leak.

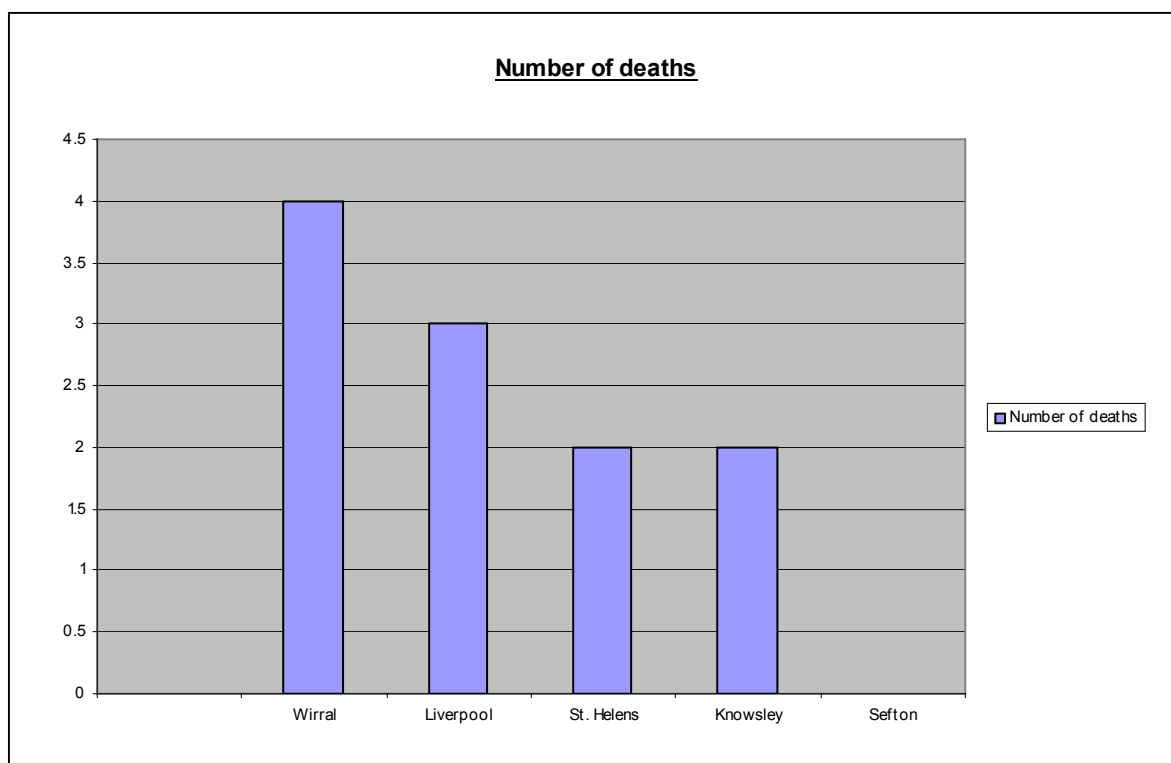
Four further fires started in lounges although in one case the lounge was used as a bedroom because the occupier had mobility problems and a hospital type bed had been provided for them in the lounge.

No station had more than one accidental dwelling fire death.

For the second successive year Wirral had the most accidental dwelling fire deaths followed by Liverpool. Sefton was the only district not to have any accidental dwelling fire deaths at all during the period. A full break down is as follows;

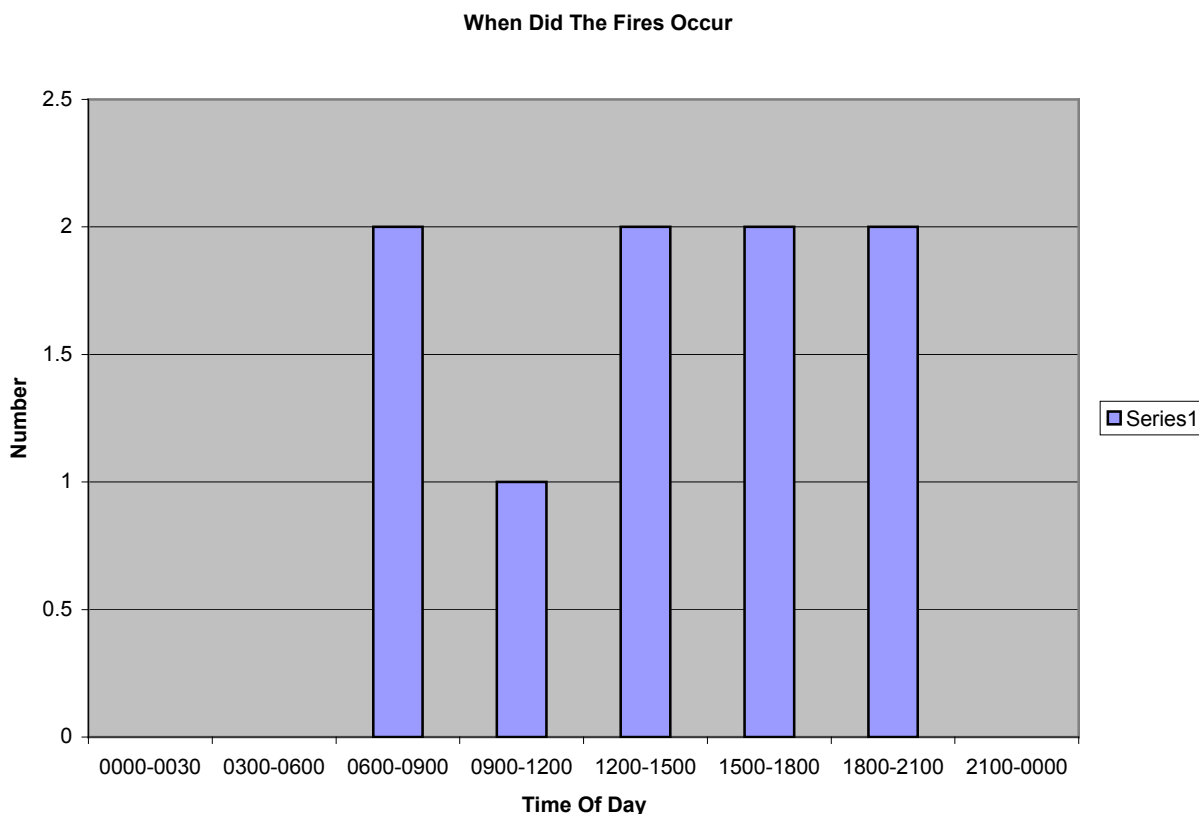
Wirral	4 fire deaths
Liverpool	3 fire deaths
St. Helens	2 fire deaths
Knowsley	2 fire deaths
Sefton	0 fire death

This mirrors last year's results when Sefton again had the least fire deaths.



## When did the fires occur?

Two of the eleven fires at which people died were not discovered immediately and it is not possible to state at what time of the day they occurred. The following chart shows the times of the day of the fires that resulted in the remaining 9 deaths.



Unusually, none of the 9 fires for which the ignition time is known started between the hours 9 pm and 6 am, the period often accepted as when occupiers are most vulnerable and when the majority of accidental dwelling fire deaths have occurred in previous years. This year however there is an even distribution of incidents between the hours of 6 am and 9 pm.

Full details of how many people became victims of fire on what day of the week is as follows;

- Monday            1
- Tuesday          2
- Wednesday      0
- Thursday        3
- Friday            1
- Saturday         3
- Sunday           1

The worst month was May when 3 people died, followed by December and January which had two fatal fires each. There was one fatal fire in each of April, July, August and September.

The longest period without an accidental home fire death was 91 days, which was realised between 23<sup>rd</sup> September and 22<sup>nd</sup> December. There was an accidental fire death in a home on Merseyside every 33 days on average.

### **Home Fire Safety Checks**

Despite over 250,000 HFSCs having been carried out in Merseyside only two of the 11 properties where fires occurred had been visited by Fire Service staff and had a Home Fire Safety Check carried out. One had been visited in 2001 and been fitted with three smoke alarms. A post fire inspection of the alarms showed that at least two were still working and that they raised the alarm.

The second home visited had been done in 2003 was occupied by an elderly bed ridden lady who was a smoker. Three smoke alarms were supplied and fitted and a flame retardant bedding pack was provided although it was not being used by the occupier when the fire started.

The remaining nine properties had not had the benefit of a Home Fire Safety Check being carried out. These tragic circumstances demonstrate that there is more work to do in targeting the vulnerable and hard to reach groups to provide the protection of a HFSC

### **Other relevant information**

All of the 11 people that died as a result of accidental fires did so in their own home and all bar one was alone in the property at the time of the fire. The one victim who was not alone was in a first floor room of origin when the fire started and it was in fact his father who was on the ground floor.

Three of the victims lived in the property with others and these were a 72-year-old female and two males aged 20 and 35 years.

Four of the deceased were, for a variety of reasons known to the Local Authority Social Services Departments. Three were known due to physical condition and their reliance on carers and the fourth as a consequence of a history of drug and alcohol dependency.

There is 1 inquest outstanding and of the ten concluded accidental death was found on every occasion and the cause of fire as reported by the fire investigator has been accepted by the Coroner.

Only three of the victims were removed from the property by rescuers, the remaining eight were left where they were found. Of the three removed one died at the scene and the others died in hospital several days later.

## **Conclusion**

Although there was a slight increase in the number of people that died across Merseyside as a result of accidental dwelling fires it is pleasing to be able to report that the general downward trend that has been apparent during the past five years is being maintained. Once again we have set ourselves a very challenging target of 10 accidental fire deaths for 2005/06 and the expansion of our Community Fire Safety Advocate programme into new areas such as the disabled community and the drug and alcohol users provides hope and confidence that we can further reduce those that suffer the tragic consequences of fire.

Although extremely pleased with the progress that has been made during recent years we must not rest on our laurels and any further reductions will only be realised by our continued commitment to the many and innovative community fire safety initiatives currently being undertaken by the Service.

**Eddie Avis**  
**Assistant Divisional Officer**  
**Investigation Team Manager**

E.W.Avis 8/8/05

**Appendix****Incident  
Summary**

<b><i>Date</i></b>	<b><i>District</i></b>	<b><i>Post code</i></b>	<b><i>Stn Area</i></b>	<b><i>Time</i></b>	<b><i>Gender</i></b>	<b><i>Age</i></b>	<b><i>Property type</i></b>	<b><i>Alarms</i></b>	<b><i>Cause</i></b>
04-Apr-04	St. Helens	WA11 0HF	Newton-le-Willows	6.58am	Male	20	Semi-house	No	Cooking facilities
06-May-04	Wirral	CH48 6EQ	West Kirby	12.10pm	Female	72	Semi-house	No	Radiated heat
08-May-04	Liverpool	L19 2NE	Speke/Garston	7.34am	Male	49	Flat-1st-low	No	Cooking facilities
25-May-04	Knowsley	L36 3SS	Huyton	Not Known	Male	65	Flat-1st (Hi)	Yes	Smoking materials
30-Jul-04	St. Helens	WA9 4XE	St. Helens	4.47pm	Female	88	Semi-house	No	Electric spark
28-Aug-04	Knowsley	L35 5EH	Whiston	6.25pm	Male	42	Flat-Grd-low	No	Smoking materials
23-Sep-04	Wirral	CH62 8EY	Bromborough	3.10pm	Female	76	Terr-house	Yes	Smoking materials
23-Dec-04	Liverpool	L17 8TQ	Toxteth	2.55pm	Male	93	Flat-2nd-low	No	Smoking materials
27-Dec-04	Wirral	CH42 4PQ	Birkenhead	11.33am	Male	35	Semi-house	Yes	Radiated heat
22-Jan-05	Liverpool	L6 6BX	Low Hill	Not Known	Male	58	Terr-house	No	Cooking facilities
25-Jan-05	Wirral	CH45 5AR	Wallasey	8.41pm	Male	34	Flat-1st-low	No	Smoking materials