

## Conclusion

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service has recorded its lowest ever number of accidental fire deaths. For the first time since records began, MFRS recorded single figure fatalities with nine accidental deaths in the region in 2003/04.

The Service set demanding five-year targets in 1999 to reduce fire deaths in the region by 40% which I'm pleased to say we achieved two years ahead of time. Our main priority now is to maintain this downward trend.

To achieve our vision we need to access those in our community that are hard to reach/influence 'at risk' groups. Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is committed to working in partnership with other agencies across the area to achieve the vision of a 'Safer Merseyside'.

We have recognised that one method of reaching the most vulnerable is by using the existing relationships that staff from other agencies, such as Social Workers, Health Visitors, Care Workers and Outreach Workers have already established. These partnerships enable us to carry out more Home Fire Safety Checks in the homes of the most vulnerable, ensuring we are targeting our resources to the sections of the community where most accidental fire deaths occur.

Each Fire and Rescue Service is required to formulate an Integrated Risk Management Plan aimed at delivering a better service to the community. The 2004/05 plan for Merseyside includes the employment of Community Safety Advocates to deliver a more customer focused home safety strategy. They are representative of a 'target group' by virtue of ethnicity, gender, age or other characteristic. I am pleased to announce that this aim is now becoming a reality and Advocates have already been employed and are furthering our aims in reducing risk from fire.

To ensure we can further improve our services to the areas of greatest need the database used by the Incident Investigation Team has been expanded to capture a much wider range of information from each incident investigated. This includes the underlying causes of fires as well as the primary cause, whether a Home Fire Safety Check has been offered and if other agencies had been involved.

This has led to specific targeted actions being implemented as part of the Community Safety Strategy. One is the partnership with some of our main alcohol retail outlets to encourage a greater take up of Home Fire Safety Checks for people who like to drink at home. As it is an unfortunate fact that the older community is a vulnerable group, community safety Advocates specifically targeting this 'at risk' group have now been employed.

Real progress in creating a 'Safer Merseyside' is now being achieved. This will further develop as I've indicated above, however, the flagship to reduce risk from fire is still the Home Fire Safety Check, completely free and carried out by professionals. I urge all Merseyside householders to book your free check now, on the freephone number provided. Meanwhile, we have set further stringent, but achievable, targets to reduce deaths and injuries from fire, and dwelling house fires in 2004/05.

Tony McGuirk,  
Chief Fire Officer,  
Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service

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# Fatal Fires on Merseyside 2003/04



[www.merseyfire.gov.uk](http://www.merseyfire.gov.uk)

# Fatal Fires in Merseyside Foreword

The Coroner has a duty to investigate the circumstances of all sudden, unexpected or unnatural deaths. In the case of fire fatalities I rely upon the expertise and professionalism of the Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service Fire Investigation Team for an analysis as to the cause and development of a fire. The Fire Investigation Team attends at court to explain its findings and this service is not only essential for my purposes but meets some of the needs of bereaved relatives at this very tragic time.

One of the purposes of the inquest system is to identify circumstances to prevent future fatalities. It is apparent to me that the Fire Authority is committed to reducing deaths across Merseyside. A thorough understanding of the circumstances and underlying causes that lead to a death are crucial to preventing future tragedies.

This is the second year that I have provided the foreword for this analysis document and it is pleasing to note the 25% reduction in accidental dwelling fire deaths in 2003/04 (9) from 2002/03 (12). Of course I emphasise that every single one of these deaths is not just a personal tragedy for the loved ones but is also a tragedy for our society.



Of particular note is the number of deaths from fires in the 60+ age group and I note that 66% of the 2003/4 deaths were in this age group, including 3 in the 90+ category. The Fire Authority have recognised this fact and introduced a myriad of initiatives to address this issue for this vulnerable group. In recognition of this, Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service have been awarded 'Beacon Authority' status and I congratulate them for that achievement.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Fire Authority for setting out the rationale underpinning their ground-breaking community safety approach for reducing death and injury for us all to be aware of, and understand.

**André J A Rebello**  
HM Coroner for the City of Liverpool  
The Cotton Exchange, Old Hall Street, Liverpool



## Home Fire Safety Check

Only one of the nine properties where fire deaths occurred had received a Home Fire Safety Check by the Fire Service. This was carried out in 2000 when the property was determined a high-risk category and two smoke alarms fitted.

A subsequent follow-up visit found one alarm had been removed and it wasn't possible to determine whether the remaining alarm was operating.

Five of the other eight properties had been targeted by the Fire Service leafleting campaign but did not respond. One had an incorrectly sited smoke alarm.

The remaining three properties had not been targeted by the Fire Service for fire safety checks, although two had fire detection. One had a defective battery and the other a hard wired system that did not operate due to the fire producing insufficient smoke.

Having a working smoke alarm gives substantial protection/warning against the consequences and threat of fire. Home Fire Safety Checks and the fitting of smoke alarms have been provided as completely free services by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service for the last five years.

Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service has fitted more than 300,000 smoke alarms free of charge. Book a free home fire safety check by ringing:

0800 731 5958

## When did the fires occur?

The late evening and early hours of the morning were the periods when most fire deaths occurred, with seven of the nine fires starting between 9pm and 6am. Only one fire death occurred from a fire started between 6am and 6pm.

The days of the week when the fires occurred were:

Monday	4
Tuesday	0
Wednesday	0
Thursday	1
Friday	1
Saturday	3
Sunday	0

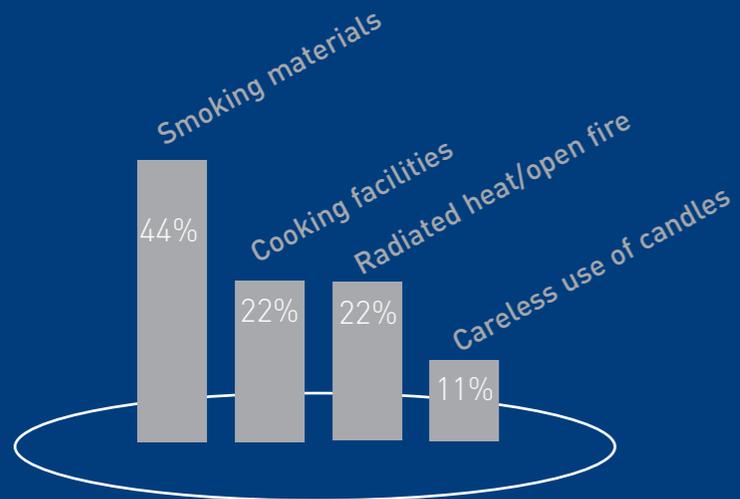
February was the worst month, with 3 fatalities, but there were no other significant factors regarding the time of the year when the fires occurred.

# What were the causes of fires?

Four of the fires were the result of careless use of smoking materials or matches, a figure consistent with last year's causes of accidental fire deaths. Two of the fires were the direct result of misuse, or careless use of cooking facilities. One was caused by radiated heat, one by an open fire setting fire to nearby combustible items and one by careless use of candles.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service and the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation have entered into a partnership to promote health and community safety by providing home safety checks and encouragement for smokers to quit. The objectives are to reduce the number of fire deaths and injuries related to smoking materials and reduce the incidence of lung cancer.

Smoking materials/matches - 4 fire deaths	(44%)
Cooking facilities - 2 fire deaths	(22%)
Radiated heat/open fire - 2 fire deaths	(22%)
Careless use of candles - 1 fire death	(11%)



# Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service

## Introduction

Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service has shown real progress in creating a safer Merseyside, recording nine accidental fire deaths in the region in 2003/04, the lowest figure since records began.

The service set demanding five-year targets in 1999 to reduce fire deaths in the region by 40% which were achieved two years ahead of time.

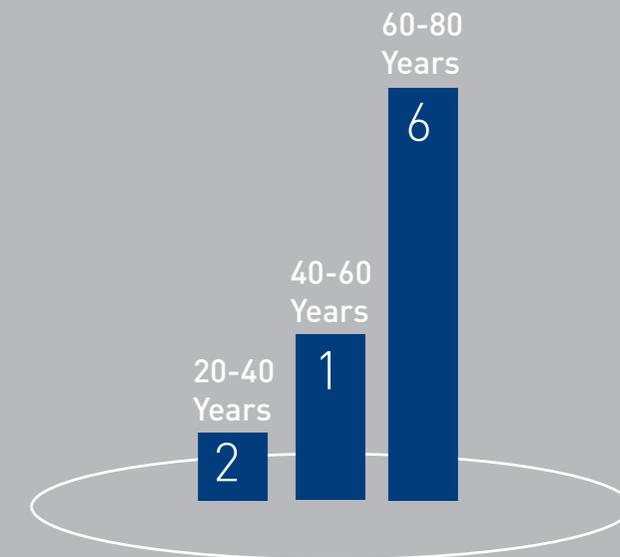
While every fatality is a tragedy, the pioneering Community Fire Safety Strategy of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is delivering results. In 2004/05, the free Home Safety Check will again be the cornerstone of our fire safety strategy.



## Who died in fires?

Of the nine accidental fire deaths, six were female and the ages of the victims ranged from 25 to 97. Older people were again seen to be more vulnerable with six (66.6%) of the victims over 60.

Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service has introduced numerous initiatives to help reduce the fire risk to the elderly. These schemes contributed to the Service being awarded Beacon Council status for Services to Older People.



## Where are people dying?

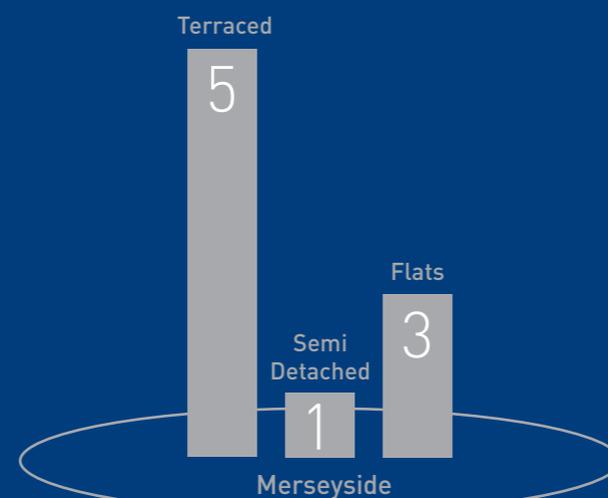
For the second successive year, all the victims of accidental fires died in their own homes and the majority occurred in terraced houses:

### Type of property

- 5: Terraced houses
- 1: Semi-detached house
- 3: Flats/multi-occupied houses

Of the nine victims, only four were in the room where the fire started at the time that it started and five were elsewhere in the property.

The five districts of Merseyside all had fire deaths with the Wirral recording the most.



## People factors

The most common underlying factor of these fires was alcohol. In six of the nine cases the deceased had been drinking alcohol before the fire started. Alcohol not only contributed to the fire starting in the six cases, but also the inability of the casualties to become aware of the fire and escape. In five of the six cases where alcohol was an issue, the casualties were believed to have been in an alcohol-induced sleep as the fire developed.

The three casualties for whom alcohol was not a factor were the oldest fire victims, a male aged 70 and two females aged 92 and 97. The three incidents involved a poorly maintained electric fire, clothing being set on fire while cooking on an open flame and the careless use of candles.

