

## HOW MANY VICTIMS HAD SMOKE ALARMS ?

There were only 2 fatal fires where properly fitted and functioning smoke alarms were installed in the affected property. In a number of incidents smoke alarms were damaged or missing.

*Having a working smoke alarm gives substantial protection / warning against the consequences and threat of fire.*

For the last 4 years Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service has undertaken a comprehensive programme of Home safety checks and fitting of smoke alarms as a completely free service.

Of those domestic fires attended by Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service over 48% have working smoke alarms that compares favourably with the national figure of 29%. Our aim is to improve that figure even further.

**ANYONE IN MERSEYSIDE CAN BOOK A FREE HOME SAFETY CHECK BY CALLING FIRE SERVICE DIRECT FREE ON:**

**0800 731 5958**

## WHEN DID THE FIRES OCCUR

The winter months accounted for the majority of fire deaths yet again with 7 people (58%) falling victim to fire between November and the end of February. This is mirrored nationally every year with more fire deaths during winter than summer. Once again local and national campaigns will highlight this issue.

Details of days of the week when fire deaths occurred indicate a higher percentage at the weekend:-

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

2002/03 was unusual in that a significant percentage of fire deaths occurred during the day, this is anticipated to be a blip rather than a long term trend. 4 fire deaths (33%) occurred between midnight and 06.00 hours and 2 occurred in early evening hours.



## CONCLUSION



Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service has set key objectives and targets for 2003/04. It is pleasing to note that fire deaths/injuries and dwelling house fires are falling and our main priority is to continue this trend.

To achieve our vision we need to access those in our community that are the hard to reach vulnerable groups. Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service is committed to working in partnership with other agencies across the area to achieve the vision of a safer community.

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. We have created working partnerships with some of the relevant agencies including Health Authorities, Primary Care Trusts, Social Services and Age Concern by training their staff to act as advocates when carrying out their visits. This enables us to carry out more Home Fire Safety Checks in the homes of the most vulnerable, thus ensuring we are targeting our resources to the sections of the community where most accidental fire deaths occur.

To ensure we can further improve our services to the areas of greatest need, the database used by the Incident Investigation Team has been considerably expanded to capture a much wider range of information from each incident investigated. This will include areas such as ethnicity, secondary/tertiary causes of fire, whether a Home Safety Check had been offered and if other agencies were involved.

The government white paper "Our Fire and Rescue Service" has been published and each Fire & Rescue Service is to formulate an Integrated Risk Management Plan which is aimed at delivering a better Service. The rationale contained within these key documents is to place primary emphasis on preventing fires rather than just reacting to them. Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service already embarked on this change of direction over 3 years ago with the ambitious programme of carrying out Home Safety Checks in domestic properties.

Real progress in creating the vision of a safer community is now being achieved. However, to build on the success, further stringent, but achievable, targets have been set for 2003/04 to further reduce deaths/injuries from fire, and dwelling house fires.

Tony McGuirk  
Chief Fire Officer  
Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service



2002/03

## 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 not only carries out an investigation but attend at court to give evidence to explain their findings. This service is not only essential for my purposes but meets some of the needs of bereaved relatives at what is a very tragic time. I am very impressed by their comprehensive and highly professional approach to fire investigation.



One of the purposes of the inquest system is to identify circumstances to prevent future fatalities. It has become clear to me that the Fire Authority is committed to reducing fire deaths across Merseyside, and a thorough understanding of the causes of fire death, and the circumstances that lead to that death, are crucial to preventing these tragedies occurring in the future.

The prevention of fire death and injury is a matter that affects us all. 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, the City of Liverpool  
The Cotton Exchange, Old Hall Street, Liverpool

## INTRODUCTION

Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service set demanding 5 year targets for reducing fire deaths in our region. The target was first set in 1999 when the average figure over the previous five years was 20+. The aim was to reduce this by 40% to 12 by 2004. This figure has already been achieved in 2002/03 and is detailed in this document.

### FIRE DEATH IN MERSEYSIDE 1999 - 2003



Every fatality from fire is a tragedy and Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service aims to drive this figure down further and has set a demanding target of less than 11 accidental fire deaths in 2003/04.

## WHERE ARE THE PEOPLE DYING?

All 12 victims of accidental fires died in their own home. The type of property is as follows:-

- 6 : Terraced Houses;
- 3 : Flats;
- 2 : Semi-Detached Houses;
- 1 : Sheltered Housing.

Of the 12 victims, 8 were in the room where the fire started and 4 were elsewhere in the property. Of those 4 that were elsewhere 3 were on the same floor.

In relation to the Districts of Merseyside where the fires occurred, Liverpool had the highest number, closely followed by Wirral. Sefton had no fire deaths during 2002/03.

A full breakdown is as follows:-



## WHO DIED IN FIRES?

Of the 12 accidental fire deaths eight were male and the ages of victims ranged from 21 - 85 years old.



This once again confirms the vulnerability of older people to fire. Nine (75%) of the victims were over the age of 60 years.



## PEOPLE FACTORS

Of the 12 people who died as a result of accidental fires, 6 lived alone. 5 were male.

In 6 fires there was evidence that alcohol had either been a factor in the fire starting in the first place, or contributed to the victims ability to escape from fire.

We know that 3 of the victims had recognised mobility problems and regularly used walking aids although it is likely, that because of their age, others also had mobility difficulties.

Sadly, this fits a pattern throughout the country where the factors that make someone most vulnerable to fire are age, mobility difficulties, sensory difficulties and lifestyle issues.



## WHAT WERE THE CAUSES OF FIRES?

There were 4 recorded causes of fires during 2002/03 that led to people dying. The causes were:-

- Smoking Materials 4 fire deaths (33%)
- Cooking Facilities 4 fire deaths (33%)
- Radiated Heat 2 fire deaths (16.5%)
- Candles 2 Fire Deaths (16.5%)

It can be seen from the statistics that the most common cause of fires are smoking materials and cooking materials. This often involves people who have fallen asleep dropping cigarettes onto soft furnishings and people leaving chip pans unattended.

Of the 12 fires, 5 started in living rooms, 5 in kitchens and 2 started in bedrooms.

### ORIGIN OF FATAL FIRES



This also mirrors the picture nationally which is why national fire safety / awareness campaigns are targeted at these areas.

