Chip and Fat Pan Fires in the Home – Policy Update

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 Safety

Summary
Advice given by Communities and Local Government to householders regarding how to deal with chip and fat pan fires in the home is now the same as dealing with all fires. When householders are confronted by a chip or fat pan fire in the home, they should get out, stay out and call the Fire and Rescue Service. This policy change was agreed with the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser.

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1.0 Dealing with Chip and Fat Pan Fires

1.1 The trend data from Fire Statistics, UK suggests that chip and fat pan fires are the biggest cause of accidental non-fatal casualties in dwelling fires. In 2006, there were 4,900 injuries in fires started by cooking appliances. This accounted for over half (53%) of non-fatal casualties in accidental dwelling fires and equates to 191 injuries per 1,000 fires relating to cooking appliances. Although the figure is decreasing in line with the national trend, the number of injuries is still significantly high enough to cause concern.

1.2 The statistics also support the wealth of anecdotal evidence that many chip and fat pan fires are caused by late night cooking, particularly by men, under the influence of alcohol. 43% of chip pan casualties took place between 8pm and 4am, and more than 30% between 10pm and 4am.

1.3 Historically, the advice given by Government and the Fire and Rescue Service to those confronted by a chip or fat pan fire in the home was to tackle and extinguish the fire themselves. The method advised was to run a tea cloth under a tap, wring it out and then place the damp tea cloth over the rim of the pan.

1.4 However, being the most dangerous fire that householders are likely to face, some community fire safety practitioners and CFOA representatives have questioned if it is right to continue to advise people how to tackle this type of fire. As householders are not trained to properly deal with fires, they would potentially face severe injury or death if their attempts to extinguish fat or chip pan fires were unsuccessful. The wet tea towel advice is also contrary to all other advice we give to the general public about not tackling fires.

1.5 This issue has been debated at the CFOA National Fire Prevention Committee. Although it was recognised that some people will continue to tackle chip and fat pan fires in the home, it was felt, on balance, that the best advice should be to ‘get out, stay out and call 999’. This would allow a trained firefighter, in appropriate protective clothing, to extinguish the fire more safely.

1.6 The advice now given in the CLG ‘Fire Safety in the Home’ leaflet, the lead leaflet in the Fire Kills campaign literature, which contains our key messages, is:

- Don’t take any risks. Turn off the heat if it’s safe to do so. Never throw water over it.
- Don’t tackle the fire yourself.
- GET OUT STAY OUT AND CALL 999

1.7 As a result of the above, Fire and Rescue Authorities may wish to review their own guidance in view of the significant number of people who are injured in fires started by cooking appliances. This should be noted when conducting chip or fat pan demonstrations, which can still be used to show the devastating effects of putting water of a flaming chip or fat pan.

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