

# Smoking: a primary cause of accidental fires

- Cigarettes burn quickly at temperatures of up to 700 degrees Celsius.
- Despite the introduction of fire-safe cigarettes, a legal requirement since 2011, cigarettes and smoking materials are still one of the most common causes of accidental house fires and the leading cause of fire-related deaths.

## Cigarettes and smoking materials are one of the most common causes of accidental home fires in England

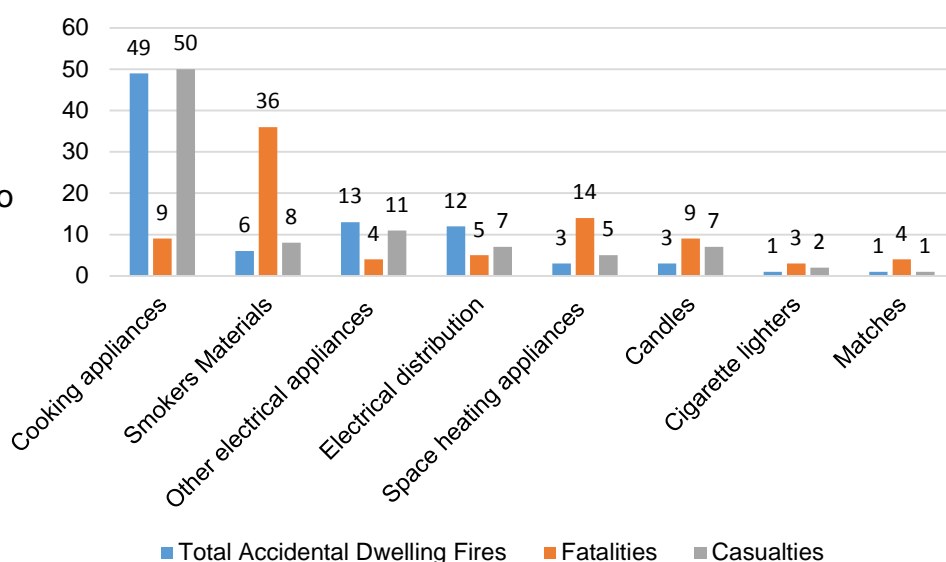
Between April 2016 and March 2017 there were **1,723** accidental house fires caused by smokers materials ([Home Office, 2017](#)).

- 65 people died, in fires from smokers materials equivalent to 36% of all home fire fatalities
- 387 people were injured.

The estimated annual cost of smoking-related fires is £329.7 million, including:

- £168.4m as a result of deaths
- £63.4m as a result of injuries
- £90.4m in non-human costs, e.g. damage to property.

**Causes of fires (%) in England 2016-2017**  
([Home Office: Fire Statistics](#), published April 2017)



## Fire damage caused by smoking



Picture credit London Fire Brigade  
Cigarettes are the most common cause of fatal house fires.

## Engagement with tobacco control

Fire Services should actively engage with public health teams and the NHS to promote tobacco control messages and reduce the harm caused by cigarettes and smoking.

They should:

- Provide **very brief advice** to smokers, including sign-posting to where smokers can get support to quit.
- Promote the use of **harm reduction**, such as using NRT or an E-cigarette which reduce the harm from nicotine addiction and the fire risk from smoking.
- Engage with local **tobacco control alliances**.

The key to preventing fires caused by cigarettes and smoking materials is providing harm reduction advice and communicating tobacco control messages. Awareness programs should be combined with effective strategies to tackle the sale of illegal cigarettes, which do not comply with fire safety requirements.



Put it out. Right out

## A harm reduction approach

The annual average death toll from fires started by smoking materials had fallen in recent years however it rose in 2016 and smokers materials remain the most common cause fatalities in house fires. 36% of all fire deaths in 2015-16. Fire services and authorities should take actions to reduce harm by:

- Providing advice to smokers about how they can avoid causing fires.
- Conducting regular harm reduction campaigns
- Taking pro-active steps to protect smokers:
  - Offer home fire safety checks to assess risks and fit fire alarms, targeting “at-risk” residents.
  - Provide flame retardant bedding and materials for the most vulnerable.
  - Provide advice to carers about the warning signs, e.g. cigarette burns on bedding.

### Examples of harm reduction advice

- Make sure cigarettes are fully extinguished.
- Never smoke in bed
- Never leave lit cigarettes, cigars or pipes unattended
- Use a proper, heavy ashtray
- Never smoke when under the influence of alcohol
- Fit a smoke alarm and test it weekly
- Never buy counterfeit cigarettes as they may not meet safety standards.
- Switch from smoking to e-cigarette use in the home
- Always use the correct e-cigarette charger

## E-cigarettes

There have been some widely reported cases of e-cigarettes and their chargers starting fires. However, such fires occur in low numbers and are vastly [outweighed by fires caused by smokers' materials](#).

The National Fire Chief's Council [position statement on smoking, vaping and tobacco](#) includes safety advises vapers to:

- Buy products only from reputable dealers, and do not buy counterfeit goods as batteries and/or chargers are unlikely to have overcurrent protection which could lead to batteries exploding.
- Never use damaged equipment or batteries
- Only use chargers designed for us with the specific device. Some chargers may overcharge the product, leading to an increased fire risk.
- Never leave a vaping device charging unattended, and never leave them charging over night.

## Reducing the availability of non-RIP cigarettes

All cigarettes burn and therefore pose a fire risk, however illicit cigarettes present an even higher risk as they do not comply with European and UK fire safety regulations and as such burn more quickly. They also continue to burn when not actively smoked, unlike legal cigarettes which are designed to extinguish when not in use.

Illicit tobacco is more likely to be purchased by poorer, disadvantaged smokers. In order to tackle health inequalities and prevent fires in the home, a disproportionate number of which occur in low-rent social housing, according to the [London Fire Brigade](#), authorities and trading standards should take action to combat the sale of illicit tobacco and to educate people about the fire risks associated with both legal and illegal tobacco. See for example [Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue and Lincolnshire Trading Standards fire safety campaign](#)

### Further Information

- [www.illegal-tobacco.co.uk](http://www.illegal-tobacco.co.uk)
- [www.stop-illegal-tobacco.co.uk](http://www.stop-illegal-tobacco.co.uk)
- [www.keep-it-out.co.uk](http://www.keep-it-out.co.uk)

May 2018