



## MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, October 08, 2009

### **Don't Risk Drowning in Toxic Smoke**

- **Major new Government fire safety campaign launches across Herefordshire and Worcestershire**

**Drowning in the toxic smoke of a house fire** is the risk you take if you do not have a working smoke alarm. That is the stark message being delivered by Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service in support of the new national 'Fire Kills' advertising campaign launched this week from the Department of Communities and Local Government.

**Two to three breaths of toxic smoke will affect your ability to breathe, a sensation similar to drowning, as shown in a TV new advert. Just two to three breaths of toxic smoke in a house fire and you will be unconscious.**

The aim of the campaign is to encourage a long term behavioral change in the public so that weekly testing of their smoke alarms becomes a habit.

New survey results from the Fire Kills campaign<sup>1</sup> show that people vastly underestimate the impact of toxic smoke: Of those surveyed:

- 39% believe they could survive for more than two minutes in a smoke filled room;
- 49% think they would be alerted to a fire by the smell of the smoke.
- 19% believe a pet (e.g. their dog barking), or someone else would alert them to a house fire.

The only way to buy vital time to escape from a house fire is by having a working smoke alarm. Although 93% of those surveyed own smoke alarms, 75% admit to not testing them every week<sup>1</sup>. This is despite the fact that you are more than twice as likely to die in an accidental house fire if you do not have a working smoke alarm<sup>2</sup>.

Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service is supporting the 'Don't Drown in Toxic Smoke' advertising campaign dramatically shows how quickly toxic smoke can impact on the human body. A sleeping couple are shown being overcome by the drowning sensation of toxic smoke when a fire breaks out in their home at night. Running in England from October 5 2009 to March 2010, the ground-breaking television campaign is complemented by print, radio and digital advertising.

Area Manager Paul Amos said:

“Toxic smoke from a fire will affect your ability to breathe in a similar way to drowning – after just two to three breaths you will be unconscious. The only way to buy more precious seconds to escape is by having a working smoking alarm. Owning a smoke alarm and hoping that it works is not enough to protect your home and loved ones.

“House fires can begin in a range of ways but they do not have to be fatal. Planning and preparing for the unexpected is key. Take immediate action by getting a smoke alarm, testing it weekly and planning an escape route in the event of a fire. Vulnerable individuals such as those who may be elderly or disabled can get a FREE Home Fire Safety Check via their local Fire Station by calling FREEPHONE 0800 032 1155 –this service includes FREE smoke alarms where necessary. These simple steps could save lives.”

Actress Jill Halfpenny is supporting the campaign. She said:

“As a mum I am very conscious of trying to keep my home as safe as possible to reduce the risks from fire, which is why I am supporting this important Fire Kills campaign. The fact is that fires can and do happen, so it's important to check your smoke alarm weekly and to be aware of the dangers. Ignorance is definitely not bliss when it comes to keeping your family safe.”

**There are five key things that you can do to protect your home and family from fire:**

**1. Fit a smoke alarm on each level of the property.** When a fire starts, there is little time to escape so an early warning is vital. Battery operated smoke alarm units should be replaced after 10 years. Or consider installing a mains powered alarm.

**2. Test alarms weekly** - a smoke alarm can buy valuable time, if it's working

**3. Plan your escape route** – make sure you and your family know the quickest way out in the event of fire. Consider an alternative route in case your usual one is blocked.

**4. Stay safe in the kitchen.** This is the area where most house fires start. It only takes a minute to check electrical appliances are switched off. And never leave cooking unattended.

**5. Ask the experts.** Fire and Rescue Services in England offer free home fire risk checks to identify potential fire risks and advise what to do to reduce or prevent them. This may even include the free installation of a smoke alarm.

**If a fire does break out in the home, then Get out, Stay out and Call 999.**

**For more information about fire safety, visit [www.direct.gov.uk/firekills](http://www.direct.gov.uk/firekills) or contact Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service on FREEPHONE 0800 032**

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