Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Creating sustainable communities

Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 – Key Factsheet 2: Focus on prevention

A key feature of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 is the new duty on all fire and rescue authorities to promote fire safety in their area. Evidence proves that prevention is better than cure. Research shows, for example, that over half of all fatalities occur before FRAs are called out. Stopping fires occurring in the first place will therefore save more lives and make communities safer, particularly amongst the most vulnerable groups.

Fire remains a major threat to sustainable communities. Research has estimated that the overall annual cost of fire to the economy in England & Wales is around £6.6 billion. The costs of arson alone amount to around £2.2 billion per year.

The speed and efficiency with which the Fire and Rescue Service responds to incidents remains vital, but the best way to save lives and reduce injuries and other losses is to reduce the number of fires that start. Sadly, evidence demonstrates that more people die in fires at night because the fires are more advanced by the time they are discovered. Typically, this is because people are asleep and are not woken, possibly because they do not have a working smoke alarm.

All fire and rescue authorities already undertake work within their communities to encourage and publicise fire prevention. But the picture across the country has varied.

The new duty means that all fire and rescue authorities must make fire prevention a mainstream activity. Authorities are already drawing up Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) to identify particular at-risk groups within their areas, and target resources accordingly (e.g. through Home Risk Assessments). In moving to a preventative and risk-based approach, fire and rescue authorities will be required to strike a balance between prevention and intervention. The Act underpins this change.