

Fire Related Deaths in Shropshire 2000/01 – 2007/08

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report provides analysis of fire deaths for the period 2000/01 – 2007/08, identifying any trends, and makes recommendations as to what further actions need to be taken to safeguard all communities in Shropshire.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- a) Note the contents of this report and recognise the success of the Service's Community Safety Strategy;
- b) Continue to support and expand the work of rural advocates ensuring that rural communities receive and equal service to their neighbours in the urban areas; and
- c) Agree that at all levels, from political, executive, middle and junior management, we must work to establish effective partnerships, developing protocols that ensure partner agency commitment to eliminating fire deaths in our communities.

3 Background

The past few years has seen significant change in Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS). The introduction of the Fire Service and Rescue Act 2004 has given the Fire Authority a new role of 'Rescue Service'. Whilst the Service has traditionally carried out this role, the Act has placed upon the Authority additional duties which have led to the introduction of specialist training, equipment and expertise; this in turn has led to improved safety for personnel and public alike.

The Service's Community Fire Safety (CFS) initiatives generated and delivered by operational personnel and the Community Fire Safety Department are now established and beginning to pay dividends. Over the period 2000/01 up to 2007/08 there has been a steady decline in fire deaths and a marked improvement in the drive to reduce injuries from accidental dwelling fires.

This is attributable to campaigns such as Home Fire Risk Assessments (HFRA), free Smoke Alarm fitting, introduction of a People at Risk Team (PaRT) and Schools Education Programmes to educate young people on the dangers they face at home, and through them reach their parents. Countless initiatives, at Station and Area level, such as rural advocate work, Local, Regional and National campaigns are now having the effect of reducing avoidable deaths in dwelling house fires.

As a combined approach all of these initiatives can and have made a significant and lasting impact on the unacceptable injury and death toll from accidental house fires in Shropshire¹.

Although the fall in injuries and deaths is reassuring the Service will never become complacent and constantly endeavours to improve year on year.

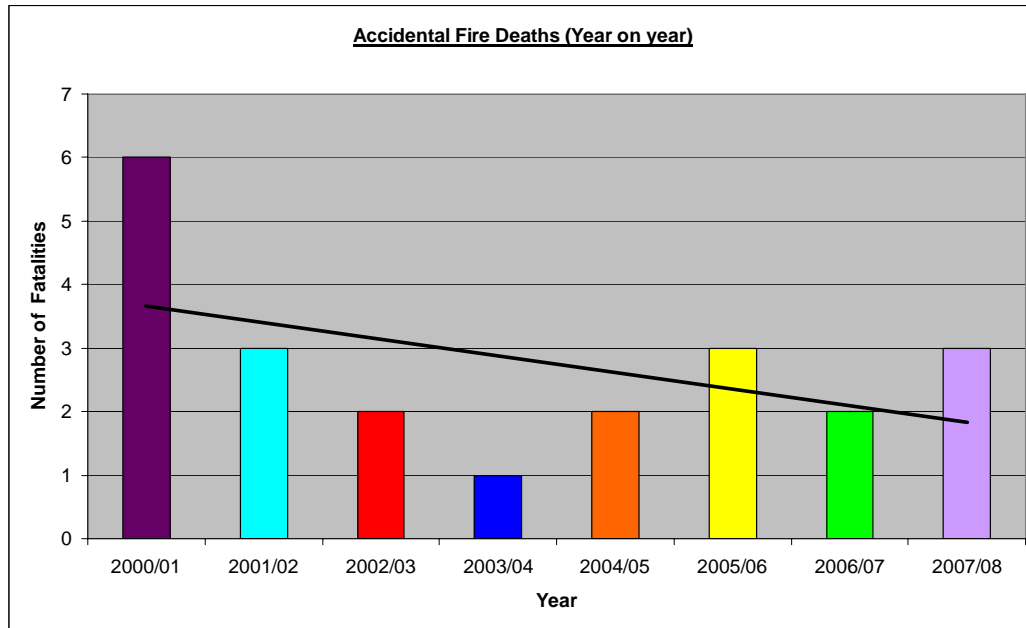
In the period 2000/01 – 2007/08 SFRS attended 25 fatal fire incidents, 22 of these fatalities occurred in domestic dwellings as a result of avoidable accidental fires.

These statistics are compiled using data from the Fire Damage Reports (FDR1), maintained within SFRS, and are used to guide Community Safety 'Prevention' Strategy at Station, District and Department level to reach those deemed to be most at risk.

4 Breakdown of All Fire Fatalities 2000/01 – 2007/08

During the period 2000/01 – 2007/08 a total of 9 males and 13 females died in accidental domestic dwelling fires. The frequency of deaths during the aforesaid period is shown in Graph 1 below.

¹ 'Shropshire,' in the context of this report includes the county of Shropshire, and the Borough of Telford and Wrekin.



Graph 1 Fire Deaths per year (2000/01 – 2007/08)

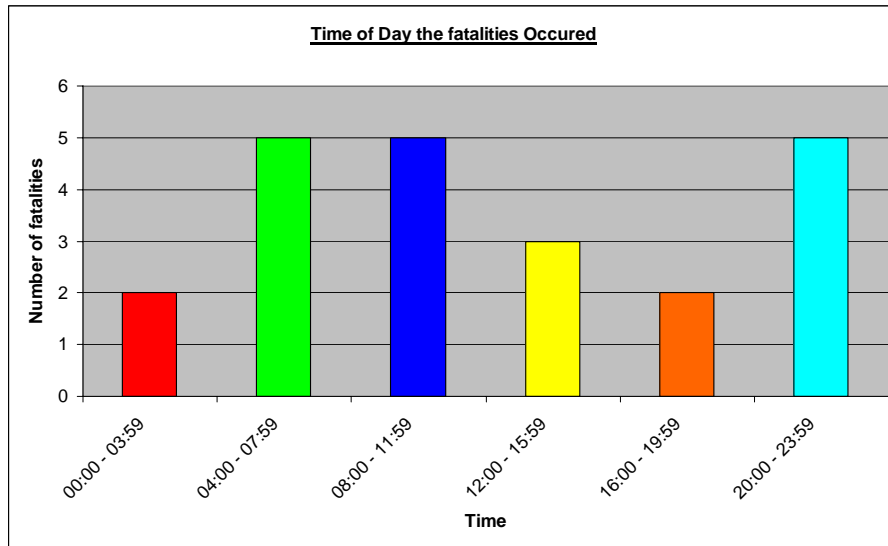
Graph 1 indicates a downward trend in accidental dwelling fire fatalities. This can be directly attributed to the ongoing CFS initiatives and education of the general public on fire safety in the home.

The strategy of free smoke alarm fitting, coupled with home fire risk assessments has had significant impact on reducing fire deaths. This strategy now actively seeks through community engagement and interaction better co-operation with partner agencies in order to identify the 'Target Areas' and vulnerable individuals within the community.

5 Geographical Location

Statistically those individuals living in rural areas (50% of fatalities) of Shropshire are just as likely to suffer the effects of a fire as those living in the more urban areas (50% of fatalities).

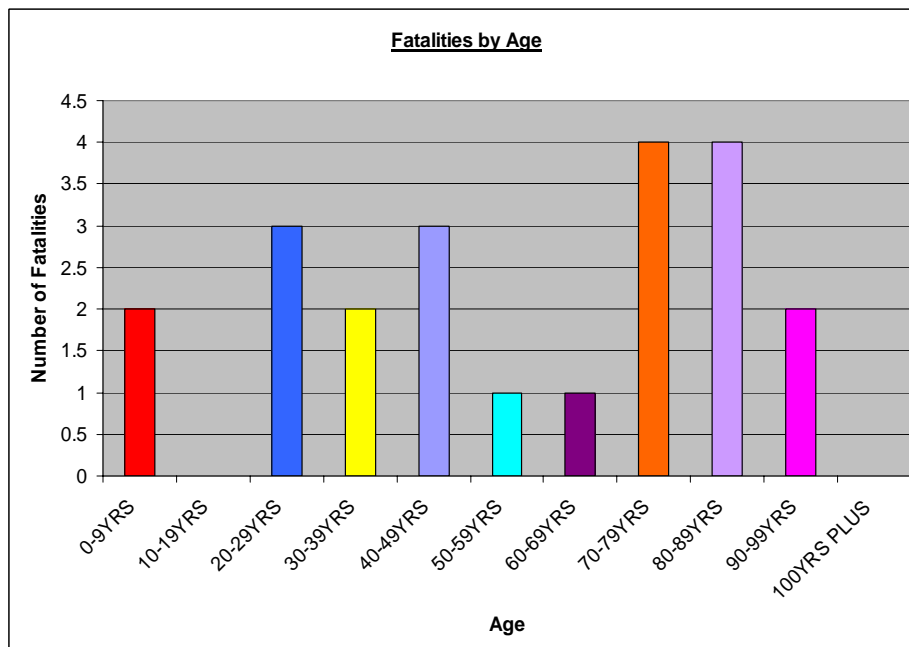
6 All Fatalities by Time



Graph 2 Fire Deaths per Time of Day (2000/01 – 2007/08)

During the period 2000/01 – 2007/08 the majority of fatalities occurred between the hours of 2000hrs and 1200hrs, national statistics reinforce this picture. It is widely recognised that the risk within domestic dwellings increases substantially during the night hours. The Service’s strategy to increase smoke alarm ownership ensures that should a fire break out during these hours, the occupiers are made aware and the alarm raised.

7 Fire Fatalities by Age

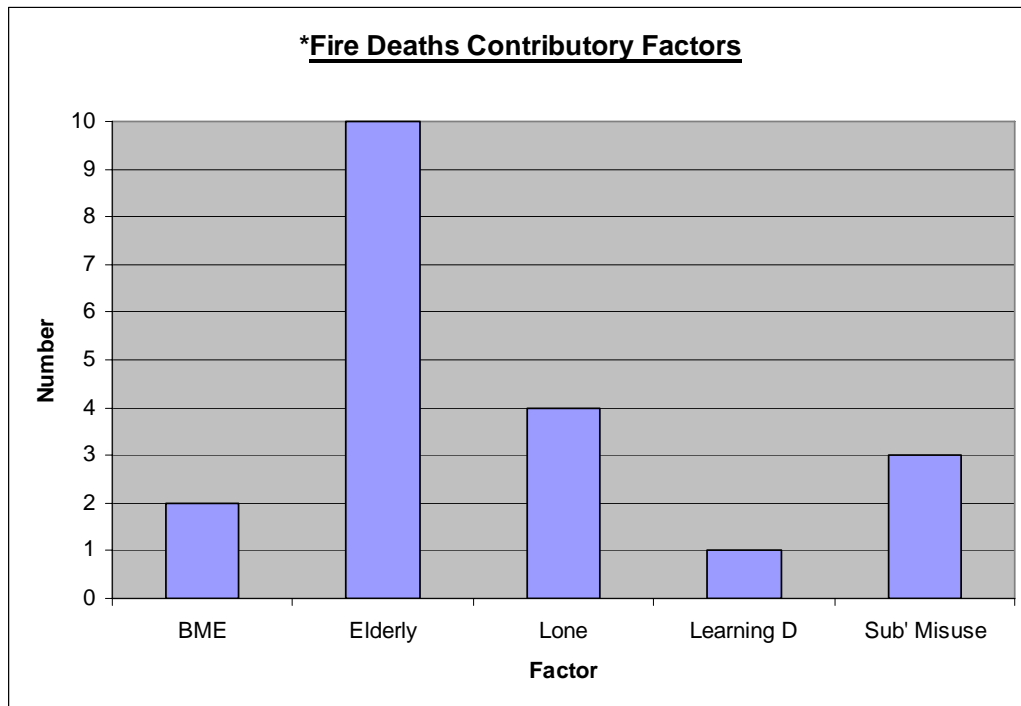


Graph 3 Fire Deaths by Age (2000/01 – 2007/08)

Statistically, middle aged and the elderly are more likely to succumb to the effects of accidental house fires, with the elderly suffering disproportionately compared to other aged groups. Those over 60 years of age account for 50% of the deaths whilst only accounting for approximately 19% of the population across Shropshire.

The creation of a People at Risk Team (PaRT), which incorporates an Elderly Persons Officer, Youth Officer, Vulnerable Persons Officer and Rural Advocate, within the CFS team provides clear evidence of the Fire Authority's recognition of vulnerable groups within Shropshire.

8 Fire Death Contributory Factors



*Information gained since 2005 following analysis of Significant Event Investigation reports.

Graph 4 Fire Deaths – Contributory Factors (2000/01 – 2007/08)

As of November 2007 there had been no fire deaths for 2007/08. However, within a six week period (December-January) Shropshire experienced three fatal fires originating from accidental domestic fires. Analysis has identified some trends that link each of these tragedies:

- **An elderly person**
- **Suspected mobility issues**
- **Living alone**

Their location and circumstances remained unknown to the Service up until the point where operational intervention was required. What is known following the fires is that working smoke alarms were fitted within each of their properties. This information reinforces the need to recognise that within certain sections of the community, the fitting of smoke alarms in isolation may be insufficient and full HFRA and fire education is required or even essential.

These three fire deaths provide us with examples where efforts through appropriate strategies, previously identified in this report, have proved unsuccessful in providing these three elderly residents with the appropriate level of safety that the majority of society enjoy.

From previous experience in this area, it is possible to predict the scenario for the next fire death within the County. Picture this, an elderly person living alone, with limited finance, suffering from long-term age related health problems requiring prescribed medication. This individual will have recently been in contact with a support agency or a number of agencies, concerned with delivering health care and promoting independent living. It is unlikely that the issue of domestic fire safety will have been attached to any assessment conducted by a number of those agencies.

The Service's partnership approach and ability to share crucial information regarding the whereabouts of these vulnerable individuals is paramount if the Service is to continue to deliver successes the attainment fire death reduction targets. Significant effort is applied to establishing effective partnerships which involve sharing of important data about those individuals and groups most at risk. Examples of the Service's activities are listed below

9 Examples of Best Practice

The Service works alongside:

- Age Concern and the Red Cross and has direct links and regular contact with elderly members of society. In 2006 members of the Service's PaRT provided awareness training to members who work for both agencies. Subsequently, these individuals are now in a position whereby they complete HFRA and fit smoke alarms on behalf of the Service.
- Agencies that provide education through campaigns to individuals exposed to substance misuse, across Shropshire.
- Mental Health Support Teams conducting joint visits to individuals on the register, which have been referred via their General Practitioner.
- Polish community through links with the business sector, to deliver education to Polish migrants.
- Telford College of Arts and Technology, who are in the process of establishing education programmes for migrant workers as part of their language courses.

- Officers from Severnside Housing in Shrewsbury, and Wrekin Housing Trust, have received training/awareness in home fire safety. Training was provided by individuals from fire station personnel and members of the CFS team. As a result employees from both agencies are more readily able to identify fire hazards within their properties and make subsequent referrals to the Service.
- Primary Care Trust (PCT) to establish protocols regarding the training of Immediate and Planned Care Teams who deal with hospital discharge of elderly people.

In addition, and as part of the Service's CFS strategy, the appointment of a part time black and minority ethnic (BME) bi-lingual advocate in September 2006 has made very positive inroads in communicating the message of home safety to members of these communities. Following the appointment of this individual, 750 successful HFRA have been completed along with the fitting of 605 smoke alarms in homes of BME people.

These are examples where partnership working results in tangible benefits to all parties.

10 Conclusions

In the field of Community Fire Safety the Service has had some very busy years, but is to be proud of the part it has played in the overall downward trend in fire deaths.

The Service's community safety strategies have grown from their inception over the past few years to a fully functioning, meaningful and highly productive strategy.

There is a definite link between fire deaths and those vulnerable groups in society. The CFS strategy recognises this and as a result has undergone changes to the structure of the team with the introduction of a number of individuals with specific references regarding vulnerable groups. It also provides a future focus as to the continued efforts in driving down fire related deaths.

Again, as with the elderly within certain sectors of the community, merely fitting smoke alarms in isolation of a robust HFRA may not provide the benefits that the Fire Authority desire. The support of these vulnerable individuals emanates from a number of public and voluntary agencies. The Service's ability to work proactively with these agencies, ensuring that a collective safety agenda is absorbed into their everyday function is paramount. The Service must continue to work at all levels to remove the barriers associated with data protection and information sharing.

In order to continue to deliver successes in the Fire Authority's fire death reduction targets, the Service must ensure the effectiveness of its partnerships. This must be coupled with their willingness to share crucial information regarding the whereabouts of these vulnerable individuals is paramount.

11 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

12 Legal Comment

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

13 Equality Impact Assessment

Officers have considered the Service's Brigade Order on Equality Impact Assessments (Personnel 5 Part 2) and have decided that there are no discriminatory practices or differential impacts upon specific groups arising from this report. An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has not, therefore, been completed.

14 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

15 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk), the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Balanced Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	
Capacity		Member Involvement	
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	
Comprehensive Performance Assessment		Operational Assurance	
Efficiency Savings		Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	
Financial		Staff	
Fire Control/Fire Link		Strategic Planning	
Information Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	*