

“A fire retardant bedding pack may have saved a life”

Betty

Betty was 65 years old and suffered from poor mobility to the extent that she spent most of her time in her living room, including sleeping there. A care plan was in place for Betty with carers visiting twice a day and a monitored alarm system installed in her home which came with a pendant alarm for Betty to wear. In November 2012, a fire started in Betty's home caused by a cigarette that she was smoking falling on to her duvet while she dozed on the sofa. Sadly, Betty was unable to escape from the fire or raise the alarm in time.

Following the fire, a defective smoke alarm was found in Betty's hallway. Care plan records were also found containing a risk assessment that showed Betty's smoke alarm was identified by her carers as not working one month before the fire. In addition, Betty had been unable to raise the alarm with the monitoring centre so the fire was only reported to London Fire Brigade when noticed by a passing member of the public.

Betty was unknown to London Fire Brigade, but if we had been invited to carry out a home fire safety visit as soon as Betty's alarm was known to be defective, we would have looked at replacing it, or provided advice on alarms more appropriate to Betty's needs such as a smoke alarm linked to her monitored alarm system. The benefit of this type of smoke alarm is that it will operate even if the person is unable to manually operate a pendant alarm.

We would also have been able to provide advice on reducing the risks specific to Betty's circumstances. For example, as Betty smoked and had poor mobility leading to her spending a lot of time in bed, our recommendation would have been for fire retardant bedding to be provided. The cost of a bedding pack is in the region of £75 and may well have saved Betty's life.