

## Press release

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### Wheelie bin fires: £49 million cost and six fatalities through arson

Chiltern International Fire (CIF) has recommended that high priority is given to the prevention of domestic wheelie bin fires, following research commissioned by the Merseyside and South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Services.

According to Philip Howard, Chiltern Fire's Head of Section, Fire Behaviour, the estimated cost of wheelie bin fires in 2006 was more than £49 million –

Government puts the cost of attending a wheelie bin fire at around £1,650. 'This does not take into account the cost of replacing the bin, cleaning up or making good any damage caused to adjacent buildings, fences or other property.'



Wheelie bin fires can quickly get out of hand because the bin rapidly collapses and melts to a pool of molten plastic, which generate large levels of heat. 'Under controlled conditions we carried out a large-scale fire test to show how quickly a fire could escalate. Even the smallest standard 9.5kg wheelie bin in common use could generate a potential heat release of 427.5 MJ, with a peak energy output of 0.95 MW,' said Mr Howard. 'There is more than enough energy to involve adjacent low level roof eaves, doors, windows, fences and other combustible products.'

Merseyside and South Yorkshire decided to commission the research after six people died in two separate incidents. Mr Howard said, 'In both cases, youths are believed to have set fire to wheelie bins stored close to the residence. The fire broke through either a window or door and into the building. Life is definitely at risk. Nearly 30,000 wheelie bin fires were reported in 2006 and the problem will not go away.'

In Chiltern Fire's view, increasing public awareness of these issues may encourage bin owners to take better precautions - and might possibly encourage the Government to take steps towards solving the problem. 'The dilemma for Fire & Rescue Services, however, is that if they highlight the dangers they are also advertising the fact that wheelie bins are an easy target. To aid in monitoring and validating this escalating problem, we recommend that fire services create a specific "stop code" for wheelie bin fires, to differentiate them from other 'refuse fire' incidents.'

With wheelie bins outside 56% of UK households, there are at least 14.5 million bins in use, not including additional wheelie bins for paper and green waste recycling. Both Merseyside and South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Services are working hard to push forward with the research undertaken and investigate possible solutions to domestic wheelie bin fires. Both have also introduced successful initiatives to warn householders about them and suggest preventive measures.

For further information visit [www.chilternfire.co.uk](http://www.chilternfire.co.uk) or email [cif@chilternfire.co.uk](mailto:cif@chilternfire.co.uk).

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