



Hampshire & Isle of Wight

FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

Emollients safety

Both paraffin and non-paraffin emollients can act as an accelerant when absorbed into clothing and exposed to naked flames or other heat sources so it's vital to stay aware of the risks and take precautions.

What are emollient skin products?

They are moisturisers that may contain paraffin or other products like shea or cocoa butter, beeswax, lanolin, nut oil, or mineral oils and they work by covering the skin with a protective film or barrier which keeps the moisture in.



Are they only prescribed by doctors?

Emollients are commonly prescribed by GPs, nurses, and other clinicians over long periods of time to treat skin conditions such as psoriasis, eczema, and sores. Many of these products can also be purchased over the counter in chemists and supermarkets.

Are they safe to use?

Yes, they are. We encourage their use as recommended by medical professionals and the manufacturer's instructions. Emollients are not flammable in isolation. If you put a match to a sample of emollient skin product it would not ignite.



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Why should people be concerned?

Regular use of these products, which may or may not contain paraffin, over a number of days, can lead to them soaking into clothing, bedding and bandages/dressings. This residue then dries within the fabric. If you then introduce an ignition or heat source such as any of the following:

- accidentally dropping a cigarette, lighted match or lighter
- sitting too near to a gas, halogen or open fire
- catching clothing on a hob when cooking, you can cause a fire to develop, burn intensely and spread rapidly.

This could lead to serious injury or death. Nationally, there have been at least 56 deaths associated with emollient skin products within the last 10 years.

What can people do to minimise risks?

- Never smoke in bed
- Do not smoke if there is any chance clothing or dressings could be contaminated with these products
- Do not cook with gas or electric hobs, if there is any chance clothing or dressings could be contaminated with these products
- Do not sit too close to any open fires, gas fires or halogen heaters
- Wash clothing and bedding daily at the highest temperature recommended by the fabric care instructions. This should reduce some of the contamination but will not remove it completely and so washing fabrics does not completely remove the fire risk.