

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

To: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE	Subject : National Consumer Week 2 - 7 November, 1998 Electric Blanket Safety Check
From: DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES	
Date: 12 November 1998 Re : PF/SP	

PROPOSED DECISION

The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report and support the ongoing initiative.

REPORT

As part of the Departmental commitment to National Consumer Week 1998, the theme for which was 'safety', it was decided to offer a free, pre-winter, test of electric blankets.

BACKGROUND

Electric blankets wear with age and can become sufficiently dangerous to start fires. Every year there are between 800 and 1000 fires caused by faulty electric blankets. In 1996, the last year for which there are figures, these fires resulted in 19 fatalities and 200 nonfatal injuries.

Tests carried out on a nation-wide basis by trading standards officers showed, that of 4000 blankets tested some 2800 (70%) failed with over 1000 (25%) being potentially lethal. It is therefore important that electric blankets are maintained in good condition. Experience suggests that many people do not have their blanket serviced and this makes a significant contribution to the problem.

ORGANISATION

The Department issued, via the Public Relations Section and with the Convenor of the Committees approval, a media release highlighting the dangers of using electric blankets which were not regularly serviced. An offer of a free electric blanket 'MOT' test was made to all North Lanarkshire residents.

In order to ensure a smooth flow of work through the system the public were advised that an 'appointment only' system would operate and accordingly they should contact their local Consumer and Money Advice Centre.

Testing was offered on the 4 and 5 November at the Departments Cumbernauld, Coatbridge and Motherwell Centres.

TESTING../

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TESTING

The Department drew up, in conjunction with Glasgow City Council's Calibration & Test Centre, a schedule of testing, based on the requirements of the relevant British Standards.

The Department's Home Safety and Consumer Advice staff initially examined the electric blankets' associated plug and fuse. If either component was incorrect or damaged both were replaced free of charge.

The blankets were then tested for integrity and safety by Calibration & Test Centre technicians.

RESULTS

A total of **fifty** electric blankets were submitted for test and examination - only 5 (10%) were found to be totally satisfactory.

Thirty Three (66%) were discovered to have plug / fuse faults which were repaired or rectified prior to subsequent testing.

Five (10%) were found to be in need of repair before being safe for use.

Two blankets required replacement due to excessive wear and a further **two** had 'extensions' to cable removed due to dangerous wiring.

Six were considered too dangerous to allow continued use.

Some twenty five consumers were late in their application for testing. These blankets will be submitted for test, by the Department, before the end of November.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to note report and support the ongoing safety initiative.

M'Kenzie L. Hutton