

# Medical Device/Equipment ALERT

Ref. MDEA(NI)2007/84

Issued: 12<sup>th</sup> October 2007

For:

IMMEDIATE ACTION	
<b>ACTION</b>	✓
UPDATE	
INFORMATION	



**HEALTH ESTATES**

creating healing environments

	Section						
<p><b>Medical Device/Equipment:</b> Curtains/bed screens risk of fire due to inadequate flame retardancy</p>	▶ ①						
<p><b>Problem:</b> Some flame retardant cotton curtains / bed screens may exhibit poor flame retardancy, with resultant risk of fire.</p>	▶ ②						
<p><b>Action by:</b> This notice should be brought to the attention of all appropriate managers and staff.</p>	▶ ③						
<p><b>Action:</b> A risk assessment should be carried out for all areas where curtains / bed screens are in use. In areas assessed as high risk, consideration should be given to replacing all cotton curtains (regardless of make) with inherently flame retardant polyester as soon as practicable.  Consideration should be given at the planning stage to fitting polyester curtains / bed screens in high risk areas including, but not limited to, Accident &amp; Emergency and mental health wards.</p>	▶ ④						
<p><b>Distributed by NIAIC to:</b>  <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">Chief Executive of each HSS Board</td> <td style="width: 50%;">NIAIC Liaison Officers</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Chief Executive of each HSS Trust</td> <td>Hospices</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Chief Executive of each Agency</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> </p>	Chief Executive of each HSS Board	NIAIC Liaison Officers	Chief Executive of each HSS Trust	Hospices	Chief Executive of each Agency		▶ ⑤
Chief Executive of each HSS Board	NIAIC Liaison Officers						
Chief Executive of each HSS Trust	Hospices						
Chief Executive of each Agency							
<p><b>Contacts</b> Details of supplier contact and NIAIC contacts for technical aspects.</p>	▶ ⑥						
<p><b>Feedback Requirements to NIAIC</b> None required.</p>	▶ ⑦						

This Alert is on our web site: <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/niac>

## **1. DEVICE/EQUIPMENT:**

**Flame retardant (FR) cotton curtain / bed screens.**

## **2. PROBLEM:**

There have been two reported incidents in which a supposedly flame retardant (FR) cotton curtain / bed screen was set alight by an in-patient in a mental health ward. After the second incident, another bed screen of identical type and age from the same ward was tested, and found that it could be set alight with relative ease using a cigarette lighter.

Chemical analysis of the two curtains involved in the fires found only trace amounts of the Pyrovatex flame retardant chemical on the fabric surface, suggesting that the FR treatment had not been applied correctly. The lack of Pyrovatex has not been explained fully but the possibilities suggested by the manufacturer include, material being missed at the beginning / end of the roll and/or problems during the baking / curing process.

The use of hypochlorite bleach in the laundering of FR cotton curtains will reduce the effectiveness of the FR treatment, but in the above incidents it was unlikely that the use of bleach would have reduced the amounts of Pyrovatex to the low levels found.

In contrast to cotton, polyester is inherently flame retardant as the material melts away from the flame, allowing it to pass the BS 5867-2 flammability test without the need for FR treatment. It is also not thought to be adversely affected by bleach. Polyester can ignite eventually, producing hot molten droplets, and this should be taken into account when choosing curtain materials.

Although no fire incidents have been reported, the findings of the investigation suggest that other makes of FR cotton curtains might also fail to perform as expected.

## **3. ACTION BY:**

This notice should be brought to the attention of all appropriate managers and staff.

## **4. ACTION:**

A risk assessment should be carried out for all areas where curtains / bed screens are in use to determine their likely risk of fire. In high risk areas, consideration should be given to replacing all cotton curtains (regardless of make) with inherently flame retardant polyester as soon as practicable.

Consideration should be given at the planning stage to fitting polyester curtains / bed screens in high risk areas including, but not limited to, Accident & Emergency and mental health wards.

If concerned, samples of surplus cotton curtains / bed screens could be tested, by an accredited test house, to BS 5867-2. At present there is no indication of the scope of the problem within the healthcare environment, therefore it would be useful if tests are carried out the result could be copied to NIAIC at the address below, to correlate the scale of the problem.

With the increased use of disposable curtains for infection control reasons, claims regarding their flame retardancy should be treated with caution; the method of testing should be established prior to putting these types of curtains into use.

Laundries (HPSS and commercial) should be reminded about the adverse effects of bleach on FR-treated cotton.

## 5. ONWARD DISTRIBUTION TO:

Please bring this notice to the attention of all who need to know or be aware of it. This will include distribution to:

- Liaison Officers
- Risk Managers
- Health & Safety Officers/Advisors
- Estates Managers
- Accident & Emergency
- Accommodation Officers
- Capital Planning & Design Staff
- Care Home Services
- Fire Safety Advisor
- Laundries
- Nominated Officer Fire
- Supplies/Procurement
- Independent Health and Social Care Providers – Private Clinics, Residential and Nursing Homes through RQIA

## 6. CONTACTS:

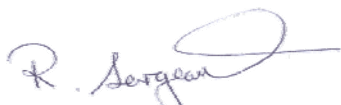
Enquiries to NIAIC should quote reference number MDEA(NI)2007/84 and be addressed to:

Northern Ireland Adverse Incident Centre (NIAIC)  
Health Estates  
Estate Policy Directorate  
Stoney Road  
Dundonald  
Belfast BT16 1US

Tel: 028 9052 3868  
Fax: 028 9052 3900  
Email: [NIAIC@dhsspsni.gov.uk](mailto:NIAIC@dhsspsni.gov.uk)

## 7. FEEDBACK:

As detailed in section 4.



Robert Sergeant  
NIAIC Operational Manager

### HOW TO REPORT ADVERSE INCIDENTS

Adverse Incidents relating to medical devices, non-medical equipment, plant and buildings should be reported to NIAIC as soon as possible. Advice on how to report is given in MDEA(NI)2006/01. If you are in doubt about how to report incidents, please speak to your liaison officer or contact NIAIC using the telephone number provided. Adverse Incident reporting forms and an on-line reporting facility are available on the NIAIC website at [www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/niaic](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/niaic)

*Heath Estates is an Executive Agency of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety*