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# Chapter 1

## Incidences of fires in the home

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- 1.1. Government policy seeks to improve fire safety in the home, reducing the incidence of fire and associated injuries and deaths. The Government's fire safety campaign, Fire Kills, which is run in partnership with local fire and rescue authorities, is used to convey important fire safety and behaviour messages to households such as the value of installing smoke alarms, and ensuring that they are tested regularly. Legislation, including Building Regulations, the Furniture and Furnishing Regulations and product safety standards are designed to reduce fire risks in the home. Between 1988 and 2013-14, the number of accidental fire deaths in the home has reduced from 731 to 181<sup>1</sup>.
- 1.2. This chapter provides a profile of households that experienced a fire at their home, including their tenure and the type of accommodation in which they lived. It will also examine how, where and when these fires started, how these fires were put out and whether there was a working smoke alarm installed before and after the incident of the fire.
- 1.3. During the interview survey, households were asked, at first, about fires that occurred in their homes in the last 12 months prior to the survey. In 2013-14, 262,000 households (1%) experienced one or more fires inside their home or on their property within the last year. For the majority of these households it was just one fire incident (94%), Annex Table 1.1.
- 1.4. Questions were subsequently asked about any outbreaks of fire that occurred between one and two years prior to the survey, (not necessarily at their current address if they have moved house). To maximise sample sizes, this report will, therefore, look at all households that had a fire in the last two years, focussing on the household's most recent fire incident. The numbers of households reporting a fire incident at their home in the two years prior to the survey were quite small, so care should be taken when interpreting these findings.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fire-statistics-monitor-april-2013-to-march-2014>

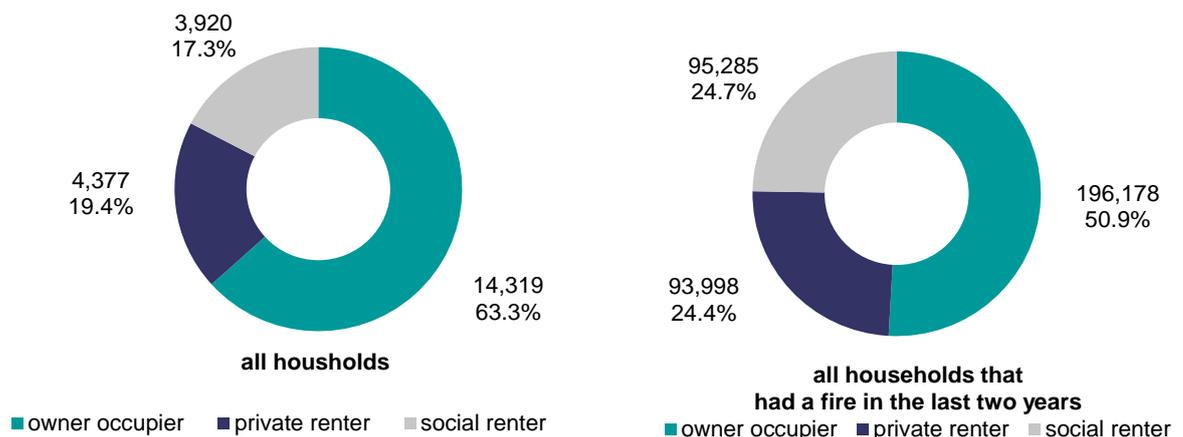
## Household's experiencing a fire in the last two years

1.5. In the last two years, 385,000 households (2%) had one or more fires inside their home or on their property; almost all these households had experienced just one fire, Annex Table 1.1

### Tenure and property type

1.6. This analysis examines the distribution of the incidence of fire among households by tenure and dwelling type. Around half of all fires were in owner occupier households (51%) although these households comprised 63% of all households in England. In contrast householders in social rented homes were over represented among households who had experienced a fire; a quarter of fires were experienced by social renters (25%) who comprised 17% of all households in England, Figure 1.1.

**Figure 1.1: Profile of tenure of all households and tenure of households that have had a fire in the last two years 2013-14**



**Base:** all households that had had a fire in the previous two years

**Note:** underlying data are presented in Annex Table 1.2

**Source:** English Housing Survey, full household sample

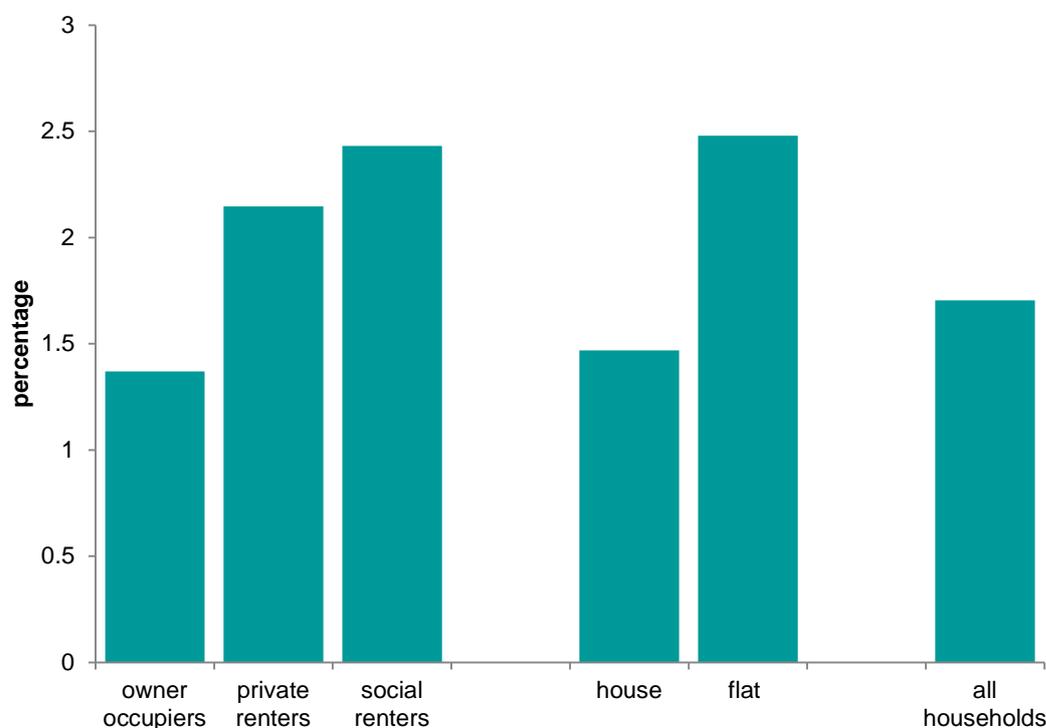
1.7. Two third of fires in the last two years were experienced by households that occupied houses (69%). Households living in flats were over represented: nearly third of these households experienced a fire (29%) although such households comprised 20% of households in England, Annex Table 1.2.

1.8. The following analysis examines the likelihood of a household experiencing a fire according to tenure and dwelling type.

1.9. Households that lived in private rented accommodation (2%) and in social housing (2%) were more likely to have had a fire than owner occupiers (1%). Households that lived in flats (2%) were more likely to have had a fire than those households that occupied houses (1%), Figure 1.2. Due to the small

sample size and the small portion of fires, it was difficult to identify whether household tenure or household property type had the greatest influence.

**Figure 1.2: Household's experiencing a fire in the previous two years by tenure and dwelling type, 2013-14**



**Base: all households that had had a fire in the previous two years**

**Note: underlying data are presented in Annex Table 1.3**

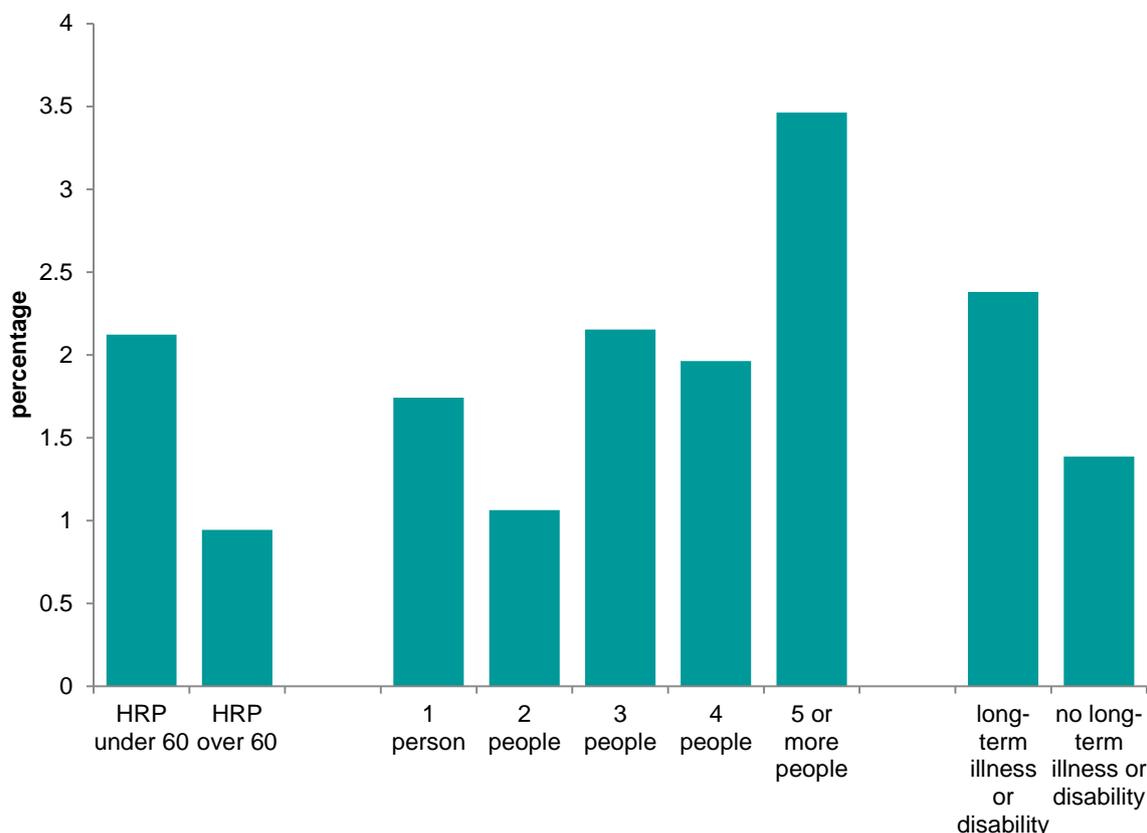
**Source: English Housing Survey, full household sample**

### *Household type*

- 1.10. Due to the small number of households reporting an incident of fire at their home, it was difficult to determine whether there was any correlation between the household composition type, the ethnicity of the household reference person (HRP) and household income and the incidence of a fire. However, the results did show a relationship between the likelihood of a fire incident and the age of the HRP, household size and long-term disability.
- 1.11. Households with a HRP aged 60 or over (1%) were less likely to have experienced a fire compared with households with a younger HRP (2%), Figure 1.3.
- 1.12. Households with five or more occupants were the most likely to have experienced a fire (3%), while households of two persons were least likely to have had a fire (1%), Figure 1.3.
- 1.13. Households where there was someone in the home with a long-term illness or disability were also more likely to have experienced a fire in the previous two

years (2%) than those households that had none (1%). These results may be related to the time households with a long-term disability or illness spend at home and their ability to respond and prevent a fire, Figure 1.3.

**Figure 1.3: Households that had had a fire in the previous two years by age of HRP, household size and disability, 2013-14**



**Base:** all households that had had a fire in the previous two years

**Note:** underlying data are presented in Annex Table 1.4

**Source:** English Housing Survey, full household sample

## Where, how and when these fires started

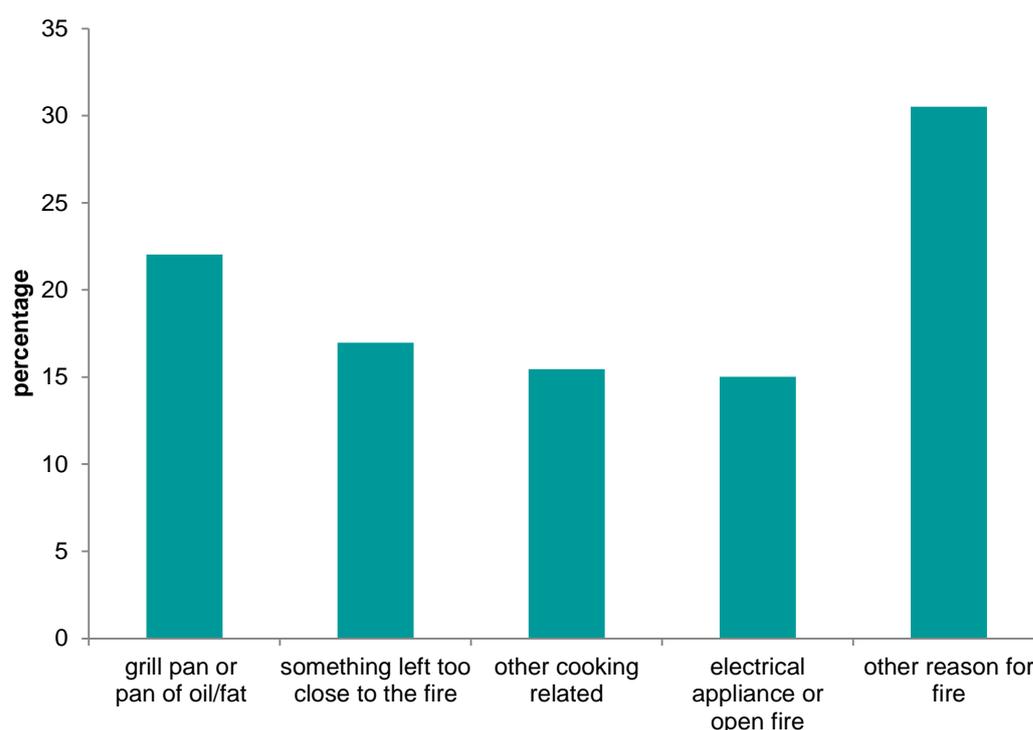
1.14. For households that had a fire, most of these fires started inside the home (79%), whilst one in five started outside the home on the household's property (21%). Where the fire had started inside, the most common place for it to start was in the kitchen (74%), which is not surprising since more than half of all fires (indoors and outdoors) were cooking related (see below). The shared living space (living room, dining room, lounge) was the second most likely place that an indoor fire started (16%), Annex Table 1.5.

1.15. Of those households that knew the cause of the most recent fire, more than half of them stated that this was associated with cooking (54%); 22% of all fires were caused by a grill pan or a pan of oil catching fire, 17% were due to

something catching fire that was too close to the cooker and 15% were caused by another cooking item such as a toaster or microwave, Figure 1.4.

- 1.16. Some 15% of fires were due to electrical appliances or open fires, with a third (31%) of fires due to some other source, such as candles, matches, or bonfires. These results suggest that a high proportion of household indoor fires are linked to risky or negligent behaviours by some households, Figure 1.4.

**Figure 1.4: How the fire started, 2013-14**



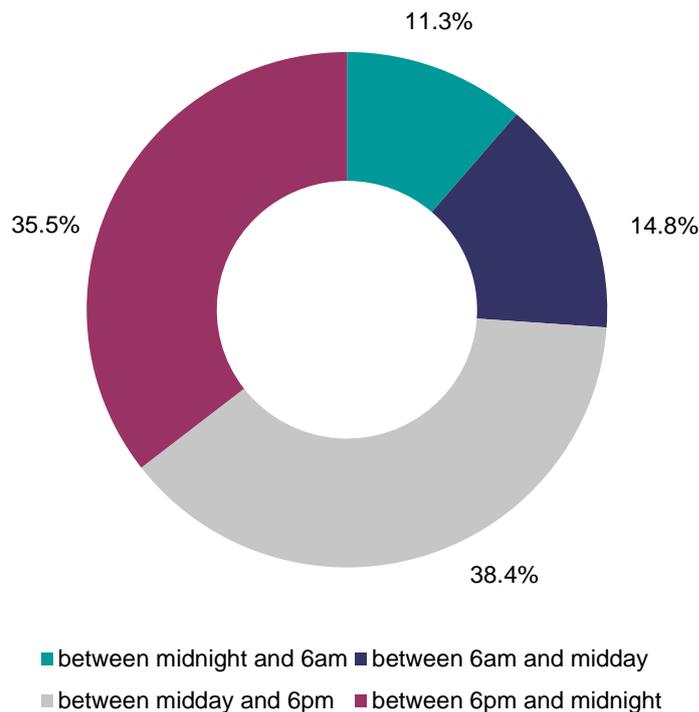
**Base: all households that had had a fire in the previous two years and knew the cause of the fire**

**Note: underlying data are presented in Annex Table 1.6**

**Source: English Housing Survey, full household sample**

- 1.17. Of those households that remembered the time of day that the fire started, three-quarters of households stated the fire started between midday and midnight (74%), which is perhaps to be expected given that this period would cover the most common cooking times, Figure 1.5.

**Figure 1.5: Time of day the fire was discovered, 2013-14**

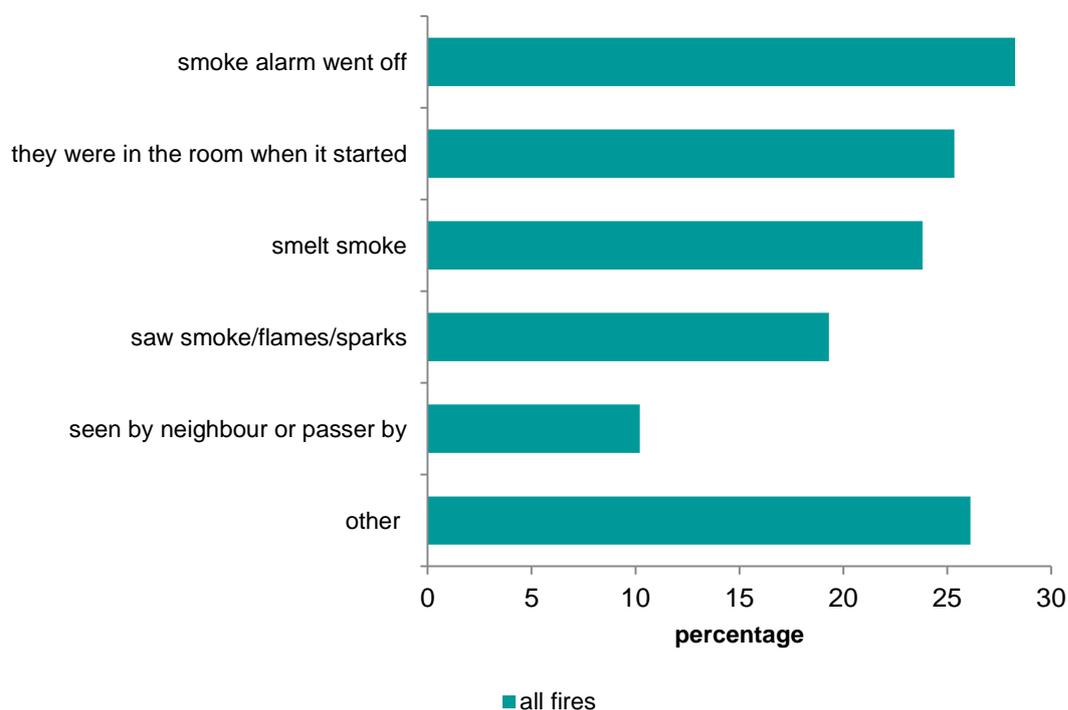


**Base:** all households that had had a fire in the previous two years and remembered the time of the fire  
**Note:** underlying data are presented in Annex Table 1.7  
**Source:** English Housing Survey, full household sample

- 1.18. Households were also asked about how they discovered the fire<sup>2</sup>. For all fires, irrespective of whether they were inside or elsewhere on the property, the most prevalent response was that the smoke alarm went off (28%); this, perhaps surprisingly low, finding may be due to there being no smoke alarm at the source of the fire or that the fire was not big enough to activate the smoke alarm, Figure 1.6.
- 1.19. A quarter of households reported that they were in the room where the fire started (25%) or they smelt smoke (24%), whilst a fifth of households were alerted due to seeing flames, sparks or smoke (19%). Around a quarter of households stated 'other' reasons for how they discovered the fire (26%), Figure 1.6.

<sup>2</sup> multiple responses were allowed for this question so figures in the supporting Annex Table will not add up to 100%

**Figure 1.6: How households discovered the fire, 2013-14**



**Base:** all households that had had a fire in the previous two years

**Note:** underlying data are presented in Annex Table 1.8

**Source:** English Housing Survey, full household sample

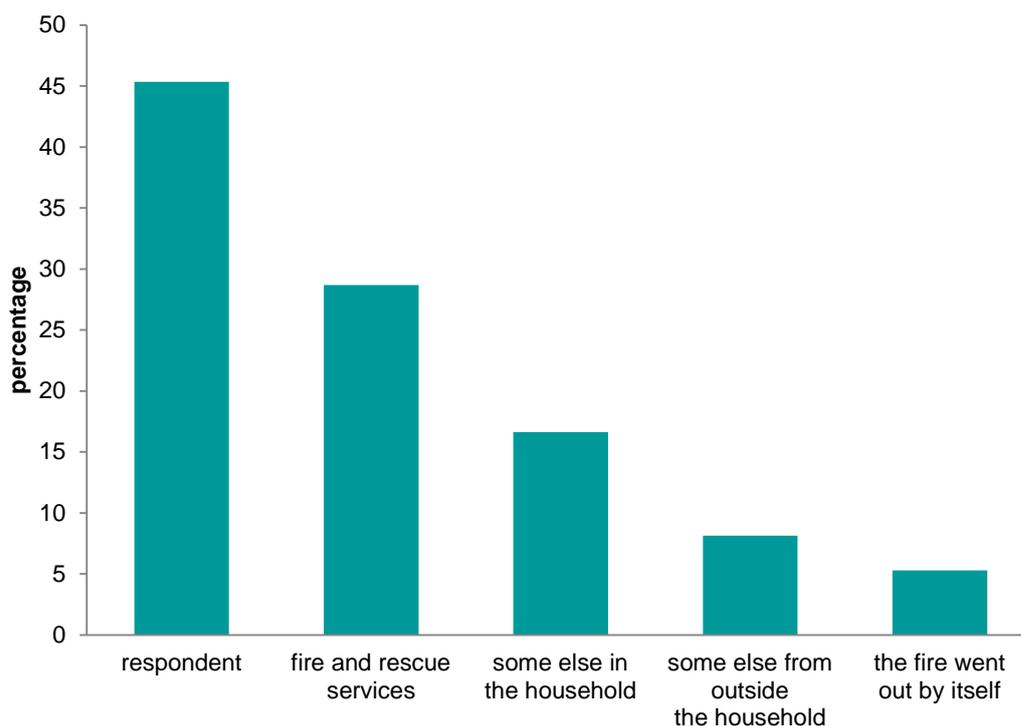
## How these household fires were put out

1.20. Households were asked who put out the fire<sup>3</sup> and nearly half of all respondents (45%) said they put out the fire themselves. Some 29% of households stated that the fire was put out by the fire and rescue services and 17% said someone else in the household had put out the fire. A small proportion of households stated that either the fire was put out by someone outside the household (8%) or it went out by itself (5%), Figure 1.7.

1.21. Only 40% of households called the fire and rescue services to assist them with putting out the fire and, as stated above, around a third of all household fires were put out by the fire and rescue services, Annex Table 1.9

<sup>3</sup> multiple responses were allowed for this question and so the supporting figures in the Annex Table will not add up to 100%

**Figure 1.7: How household fires were put out, 2013-14**



**Base:** all households that had had a fire in the previous two years

**Note:** underlying data are presented in Annex Table 1.9

**Source:** English Housing Survey, full household sample

1.22. For 93% of all households that had had a fire in the previous two years, no member of these households had suffered any related injuries. The remainder of households reported minor injuries, such as smoke inhalation, or scratches or bruises, Annex Table 1.9.

## The relationship between a household's incident of a fire and having at least one smoke alarm

1.23. In 2013-14, 92% of all households in England had at least one smoke alarm installed in their home, although not all of these were in working order (see chapter 2 of this report); some 88% of households had at least one working smoke alarm installed. In either case, there was no observable relationship between whether or not a household had a non-working or working smoke alarm at the time of the survey and whether or not they had experienced a fire at their home in the previous two years: the incidence of fires was the same in each case. This finding may suggest that having a non-working or working smoke alarm does not necessarily impact on risky or neglectful behaviour in relation to fire hazards, Annex Table 1.10

1.24. As the above finding is based on smoke alarm ownership at the time of the survey, the following analyses examines whether households had a smoke

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alarm installed at the time of the fire. Most households (80%) that had a fire in the last two years had had a smoke alarm installed at the time of the fire, Annex Table 1.10

- 1.25. Of these households that had had a fire in the last two years and an alarm was installed at the time of the incident, around half of these alarms were triggered by the fire (50%), Annex Table 1.11.
- 1.26. Nearly half of households with smoke alarms (48%) said their alarms did not go off at the time of the fire, Annex Table 1.11. There were legitimate reasons why most smoke alarms were not set off by the fire, for example nearly a third of these smoke alarms (31%) did not go off because they were not located near the fire, the fire was outside (17%)<sup>4</sup> or the fire was put out very quickly (27%), Annex Table 1.12.

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<sup>4</sup> outside fires have not been reported on further as the sample size was too small