

SYNOPSIS



At about 0245 on 20 January 2007, a fire broke out on board the narrowboat *Lindy Lou* which was moored at Lyme View Marina, Adlington. One person died as a result of the inferno, which quickly swept through the boat. The other occupant, the owner of the boat, suffered from serious burns and effects of smoke inhalation.

It was a cold, wet and windy night. The interior of the boat was cosy when the couple arrived back on board, and the owner added some more fuel to the stove to keep the boat warm overnight. They opened a bottle of vodka, and drank this between them before going to bed.

During the night, the owner woke and found the air in the boat to be extremely warm and stuffy. He got up to open the double hatch doors on the starboard side of the boat to let some air in, and then also opened the aft door. Having stepped outside onto the aft deck to cool off, he became aware of an orange glow from the forward external covered deck, and walked along the towpath to investigate. As he approached, he realised that the canopy was burning, and that flames seemed to be emanating from inside the boat. He turned to go back aft, and at the same time, the forward port window shattered and flames leapt out of the saloon.

Despite his desperate attempts, the owner was unable to re-enter the boat, and as his girlfriend had not appeared, he ran to a nearby boat to seek help. A “999” call was made and the first of three fire engines arrived on scene at 0302, and the fire was extinguished by 0319. The body of his girlfriend was later discovered in the bathroom area, and a postmortem established that she had died from the inhalation of smoke and fumes.

The boat had been extensively damaged during the fire, which had burnt fiercely and quickly. The most likely cause of the fire was the solid fuel stove, which had not been installed in accordance with the stove manufacturer’s recommendations, as the hearth dimensions, and the air gaps around the stove were less than recommended. It is possible that either an ember fell onto the nylon carpet in the saloon when the stove was stoked, or that there was radiant heat transfer from the stove and its flue to a nearby combustible item (e.g. a beanbag, a book propped up near the hearth, or a plastic loudspeaker that was attached to the wall behind the flue). Evidence was also found of possible long-term charring of the wooden hearth structure beneath the tiles, and this structure might have also ignited to cause the fire.

The investigation has identified that, although British Standards are available for the installation of solid fuel stoves and flues in buildings, park homes and transportable accommodation units, there is no such standard for their installation on boats. A draft proposal for a new standard to address this omission is currently being developed by the British Standards Institution (BSi).

No smoke alarms were fitted on *Lindy Lou*. The Recreational Craft Directive (RCD) EN ISO 9094, and the Boat Safety Scheme (BSS) do not currently require these to be fitted to recreational craft. The BSS has now strongly recommended that boats with overnight accommodation are fitted with at least one suitable and effective smoke alarm.

A recommendation has been made to the British Standards Institution to propose a change to the current ISO standards so that smoke alarms are required to be fitted on habitable small craft.