

Health and Safety Bulletin

Ref: 2017/01

April 2017

Safe Use of Candles in Schools

Background

Candles are used in many schools across Northumberland during worship and special festivities such as Christmas and Easter. This has been the practice for many years without incident or injury and with sensible precautions in place.

However, an incident occurred in a Northumberland school in December 2016. A flame from a candle came into contact with cotton wool on a pupil's fancy dress face mask, causing the cotton wool to smoulder. The mask had been made at school for a Christingle performance. Fortunately in this instance, the mask was quickly removed and the pupil sustained no lasting physical injuries.

Whilst there were a number of factors that led to this incident occurring, one of the key causes were the materials used to create the face mask coming into contact with a naked flame. Similarly, there has been much media attention relating to the flammability of fancy dress outfits purchased from shops and which are often brought into school during seasonal activities. The BBC's consumer programme 'Watchdog' began a campaign to change the fire safety regulations on fancy dress children's costumes after an investigation by the programme revealed that items that met the BS EN71-2 standard, which treats fancy dress costumes as toys, quickly caught alight. This campaign gained national coverage after the BBC television presenter Claudia Winkleman's young daughter suffered severe burns when a fancy dress outfit she was wearing was ignited by a naked flame. Fancy dress outfits do not presently meet the stricter flame retardant requirements of children's nightwear.

What do Schools need to do?

Schools can continue to use candles during worship under strict adult supervision. However, the school should consider the alternative use of LED candles where appropriate. If pupils are to carry lit candles, then it is important to ensure that:

- They are not wearing fancy dress outfits masks etc.
- Hair is tied back, (without ribbons, large hair bows etc.)
- There is no loose clothing such as scarves and ties that are likely to come into contact with the naked flame
- Sufficient space is maintained between pupils holding candles
- There is a sufficient gap between pupils that are wearing fancy dress from those pupils holding candles.
- The candle should be held in a suitable holder

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A generic risk assessment has been produced that can be utilised by schools that wish to use candles. The information does not need to be regarded as prescriptive, but should be used to inform the schools own risk assessment for the activity.

[Risk assessment for candles in schools.](#)

For further information please contact the Corporate Health and Safety Team on 01670 623854 or email healthandsafety@northumberland.gov.uk