

RURAL FIREWATCH (Boughton Malherbe / Grafty Green)

Questions, Answers, Facts, Information

This news sheet is brought to you as a joint initiative between Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) and Boughton Malherbe Parish Council following the presentation given in the Village Hall on 31st January. The purpose of this news sheet is to briefly cover various points raised by parishioners since the meeting and to give an important summary to those unable to attend the meeting. Please remember the Community Safety Department at KFRS (contact details at end of this news sheet) is best placed to advise you on fire safety in your home and will on request do a free home visit and if practical fit suitable smoke alarms (free of charge), including special ones for people with specific disabilities e.g. deafness. The key is PREVENTION rather than the fire service coming to your home to put a fire out, particularly in a rural locality where operational challenges not experienced in urban areas (poor road access, fewer hydrants, low water pressure etc.) are likely to occur.

Q. I've never made a 999 call and wouldn't know what to do.

A. *It's quite simple – keep calm, dial 999 and you will be connected to the BT exchange operator who will ask you which emergency service you require 'FIRE, POLICE, AMBULANCE or COASTGUARD. You will then be quickly connected to the relevant emergency service control room operator who will ask you relevant details and despatch the emergency crews. Knowing the incident location post code is helpful but not essential.*

Q. Why might the fire engine come from Maidstone or Ashford and not Headcorn or Lenham?

Crews are constantly moved around the County so that there is adequate cover for all places at all times and it is also not possible for every fire station to be crewed 24 hours a day, similarly the formerly known 'retained stations', now known as 'part-time on call stations' could not always raise a crew when required.

Q. How long will the first fire engine be coming to the village?

It is difficult to answer, if an appliance is on the road between stations and nearby it could be very quick, alternatively it could be in the region of twenty minutes depending on incidents elsewhere at the time, also road, traffic and weather conditions. KFRS will always try for a first on scene fire engine within 10 minutes.

Q. What should I do if I have a fire?

Raise the alarm, evacuate the property closing doors if possible and phone the fire service immediately using 999. Do not put yourself or others in danger – the fire service will not worry if it turns out to be a minor fire or even false alarm with good intent. Small fires can become serious very quickly so no time should be lost in calling for assistance. If practical and possible switch off the electricity supply at your mains, similarly any other fuel source (oil or gas). It is a complete myth that KFRS charge for attending chimney or any other fires.

Q. Is there anything I should do or know to help the fire service?

Keep calm, be clear about the location (with post code if possible) of the fire or rescue required, and as much detail about the incident as possible. Keep pets out of the way in a safe place (particularly dogs). Keep a 'look out' on the road and clearly signal the first fire engine. Know the location of your nearest fire hydrant.

Q. I've heard fumes can kill.

Carbon Monoxide known as the 'silent killer' is a colourless, smell-less gas given off with numerous types of burning including wood and oil. Breathing these fumes can 'immobilise' you very quickly making 'escape' impractical. Many other gases given off by burning are equally toxic and dangerous. It is vitally important all chimneys, flues, boilers, wood burners and other types of fuel burning appliances are regularly serviced and maintained in good condition by appropriately qualified and registered trade technicians. Don't risk it!

❖ KFRS FACT: 'JUST 2 or 3 BREATHS OF TOXIC SMOKE CAN RENDER YOU UNCONSCIOUS'

Q. What about smoke alarms?

These are vital and there should be at least one in a key location on every floor level, preferably on the ceiling of a hallway or landing. Additionally also consider vulnerable areas such as loft spaces where a fire can start and become serious before it is detected. There are many types of smoke alarm from simple battery types, those working from the electric supply, interlinked alarms, special alarms for the deaf and blind etc. All require regularly (weekly) testing as even the electric types have battery back up in event of a power cut. Smoke alarms can be inexpensive (even fitted free by KFRS) and potentially save your life. As important as smoke alarms are carbon monoxide detectors which will detect even minor quantities of this deadly gas.

KFRS FACT: 'YOU'RE 4 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO DIE IN A HOME FIRE IF YOUR SMOKE ALARM IS NOT WORKING'.

❖ 'TEST IT BEFORE YOUR TIME STOPS'

Q. Should I have a fire extinguisher or anything else?

They are a good idea and there are numerous types, some relatively inexpensive. Be sure to get one suitable for the purpose you envisage. Never put yourself in danger trying to use one and always call the fire service first. A fire blanket (useful for 'chip pan' fires and the like), torch, first aid kit all kept in a central readily accessible location are useful but again a fire blanket should only be used with extreme caution.

❖ KFRS BEST ADVICE: 'GET OUT, CALL US OUT, and STAY OUT'

Q. What precautions can I take to minimise the risk of a fire?

Much of what you can do has already been covered, however always be careful with the storage of inflammable or combustible liquids or materials and keep them away from any potential heat sources. Keep all exit routes in a property clear and keys accessible to each and every exit door, similarly keys for window locks for potential exit windows – remember you could have to escape in the dark if the electricity supply has 'tripped' because of a fire situation. Night time security is of course very important, so too is being able to get out quickly if the unfortunate need arises so having all the keys hidden or locked away in perhaps the kitchen could be catastrophic if that's where the fire occurs. Keeping a 'dog lead' adjacent to each exit door is practical to get your pet out safely as well as they too may panic in a fire situation. The importance of chimney, flue and boiler safety inspections has already been stressed and the same applies to your electricity supply and electrical appliances. Rodents (rats, mice, even squirrels) are of course commonplace in rural areas and 'lofts' in houses and outbuildings can be particularly prone to attack with 'chewed' cables.

Q. What precautions should I take in the car?

Really much the same as your property. An additional useful item can be an 'emergency hammer'. These can be purchased very cheaply and can be used to break windscreen or window glass in an emergency, they also incorporate a safety blade for cutting seat belts in emergency. High visibility vests for driver and passengers should always be used in the event of break down or accident requiring exiting your vehicle on any road.

On a general note volunteers in the Parish are working closely with KFRS to ensure as far as practical that fire hydrants are easily identifiable and ready for emergency use at all times. Please never obstruct a hydrant at any time – they now have bright yellow covers and are marked with an 'H' in the road. Volunteers also liaise on fire prevention and other topics like identifying specific fire risks and possible 'back up' water resources. Finally if you know of or live near a potentially vulnerable person, perhaps elderly, disabled, chronically ill or Just living on their own, who you think might benefit from some specific fire safety advice PLEASE contact KFRS Community Safety Team to arrange a FREE HOME VISIT for them including fitting specially adapted alarms.

KENT FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE EMERGENCIES DIAL 999

ALL KFRS NON EMERGENCIES & GENERAL ENQUIRIES telephone 01622 692121 www.kent.fire-uk.org

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