



## Case study 1 - Tom Halsey, London

The flats where Tom Halsey lives are carefully maintained by a local housing association. Following routine refurbishment and re-wiring of the properties, they were all recently fitted with ten-year smoke alarms. Fitting these long-life alarms ensured more vulnerable tenants did not need to keep checking batteries and could rest assured that the alarms were in working order for the next few years at least.

In late June this year, not long after smoke alarms had been installed, Jamie Richens, who lives in the flats, heard a smoke alarm going off very nearby. Jamie immediately headed for his elderly neighbour Tom Halsey's flat. Jamie and his girlfriend Denise are good friends with Tom and pop into to see him daily. Once outside Tom's flat, Jamie could clearly hear the smoke alarm sounding.

Jamie pounded on the front door but there was no reply. Jamie felt for heat around the door and when he looked through the letterbox, thick smoke began pouring out. Jamie knew he had to get Tom out as soon as possible. He forced the front door open then crawled along the floor towards the kitchen. Jamie found Tom slumped in the kitchen, so dragged him to fresh air and safety.

Tom's life had been saved, not only by the heroic actions of his neighbour, Jamie, but also by the smoke alarm doing its job: alerting people to fire. Had it not been for the sound of the alarm, Tom could have been overcome by the smoke and may have died.

"As soon as I heard the alarm, I knew it was coming from Tom's flat," said Jamie. "He spends most of his time in the kitchen so I knew I had to head in that direction. Luckily I've been in and out of Tom's flat many times so I know my way around. Thank goodness he had the alarm fitted, I don't think he'd be with us today without it."

Jamie Richens has been commended by the Humane Society for his quick thinking and life-saving actions. "He's a good lad and I've got a lot to thank him for," said Tom. But were it not for the smoke alarm, Jamie would have been totally unaware of the fire in Tom's flat. The installation of a smoke alarm saved Tom Halsey's life.



## Case study 2 - the Skinners, Norwich

Pat and Tony Skinner have lived in the same house in Norwich for over thirty years. They've always tried to remember to have a working smoke alarm in their home, but there have been occasions when they've forgotten. Luckily for the Skinner's, they fitted a new one at just the right time, which saved them from a potentially fatal fire.

Tony Skinner, 55, had decided it was time to redecorate the hall. He and his wife Pat, 52, set off to their local DIY store to stock up decorating materials. Whilst they were in the store, Tony noticed there was a special promotion on smoke alarms. "I hadn't planned to buy a smoke alarm, but when I saw these on offer I thought why not".

Once the hall was re-decorated Tony fitted the smoke alarm in the stairwell. Tony regularly checked the batteries were still working, "I can press the 'test' button quite easily as I go up and down the stairs, and so I was used to checking it periodically". And thank goodness Tony did.

A couple of months later Pat and Tony were woken in the middle of the night. "It was about 1.30am and I heard this loud bang. The next thing we heard was the smoke alarm going off and Pat and I were out of bed as fast as we could." It seems an electrical fault in the lounge had started a fire and smoke had started to seep under the lounge door and into the hall.

The bang Pat and Tony had heard was the sound of the patio doors in their lounge exploding. The Skinners raced to the landing and luckily Tony had fitted a smoke alarm with emergency lighting. As the fire had started as a result of an electrical fault the rest of the house was shrouded in darkness and was rapidly filling with smoke. The light from the smoke alarm lit their route to safety.

"That smoke alarm saved our lives and probably saved our home, too," said Tony. The lounge, where the fire started, was gutted, causing some £20,000 worth of damage. There was considerable smoke damage up the stairs, but at least Pat and Tony were alive.

Tony said, "Because the smoke alarm was on the stairs, it alerted us to the fire before the smoke became too dense. Smoke alarms don't cost much and are easy to fit. We'd never be without one now, it saved our lives."



### **Case study 3 - the Johnsons**

Dave and Stephanie Johnson have an extra special reason to be thankful they had smoke alarms installed in their home - their smoke alarm saved the lives of their two small children. The firefighters who extinguished the fire said if the girls had been left only two minutes longer they would have been killed.

It was only late June this year that the fire struck. Dave Johnson was just getting ready to turn in for the night at about 10pm. His wife, Stephanie, and two children, Kate, 7, and Hannah, 4, were already in bed. The girls had a bedroom in the roof of the Johnson's dormer bungalow and had been asleep for some time.

As Dave left the bathroom downstairs he heard the smoke alarm in the girls' bedroom sounding. As it had never gone off before, Dave immediately went upstairs to investigate. As he climbed the stairs he became aware of smoke seeping out of the loft door.

"I knew at once we all had to get out of the house, even though I couldn't see any flames. I had no idea at that time that smoke could be so dangerous, I am so relieved we had time to escape."

Dave called Stephanie, who raced up the stairs to help him carry Hannah and Kate, still sound asleep, to safety. Once the girls were out, Dave had to ensure Stephanie's elderly mother was out of the house. As her bedroom was on the ground floor, she was not in immediate danger.

It wasn't until Dave and his family reached their neighbours' house that they realised just how close things had been. "I turned round and saw flames about thirty feet high burning through the roof and in the girls' bedroom. In the few minutes from helping Stephanie's mother out to reaching the safety of our neighbours house the fire had really taken hold." The sound of the smoke alarm had saved their lives.

The fire gutted the Johnson's house. Had it not been for the smoke alarm's prompt, the house next door would probably have gone up too. "You can re-build bricks and mortar," said Dave after the fire, "But you lose children forever. I have to say that buying that smoke alarm was the best £4 I have ever spent, it saved my children's lives."

## Case study 4 - Mr Barran, Leeds

Mr Barran of Leeds, West Yorkshire, has many different people to thank for saving his life. Mr Barran, who is in his seventies, was saved from death by the quick thinking of two BT engineers. They bravely pulled him to safety after being alerted to his plight by smoke alarms that had been recently fitted.

Mr Barran had been identified as being potentially at risk from fire so firefighter, Keith Robinson of Hunslet Fire Station, made a visit to Mr Barran's home. Keith spent some time looking round Mr Barran's home, assessing the risk from fire and the best locations for smoke alarms to be fitted. A total of four smoke alarms were fitted in Mr Barran's house, with Keith choosing ten-year alarms to ensure Mr Barran would not have to worry about checking batteries. Keith also informed local social services that Mr Barran might need additional help. "Mr Barran appeared very vulnerable, his home was in a very poor state of repair and there were several potential fire risks in his home."

Before more help could be given, disaster struck. A faulty gas fire in Mr Barran's home caused the fire surround to ignite and a fire started in the lounge. Mr Barran realised there was something wrong when his alarms sounded and ran to his front door. Luckily for Mr Barran two BT telephone engineers were working only 50 yards away.

"We saw this elderly gentlemen come out of his front door, he shouted something and seemed to be distressed," said Mark. "We had heard the smoke alarms going off and as we got nearer we could see smoke coming out of the kitchen window."

BT engineers Mark Heywood and Peter Troughton didn't waste another moment, rushing into the house and helping Mr Barran to safety. "He was very disorientated by the smoke and the noise of the alarms, but luckily nothing worse than that," said Mark. The two heroes then called the fire brigade and switched off the gas mains thus preventing an even bigger disaster.

"It all happened so fast," said Mark. "We'd noticed Mr Barran but it was the smoke alarms going off that really alerted us to the fact that something serious was happening." The combined efforts of the local community, the fire brigade and Mark and Paul had saved Mr Barran's life. And the smoke alarms.

Following their life-saving actions, Mark Heywood and Peter Troughton have been awarded the Chief Fire Officer's Commendation; a bravery award for civilians. "Mark and Peter's quick reactions saved Mr Barran, but the smoke alarms fitted only days earlier were the key to alerting them and Mr Barran himself to the fire," said Keith. "Smoke alarms save lives and cost very little, they not only warn the householder of fire but can also alert friends and neighbours. I doubt Mr Barran would be alive today without his alarms."



## Case study 5 - Iris Berry, Truro

Wendy Long knows only too well how important it is not only to have a smoke alarm, but also to have one that works. Sadly for Wendy she learnt the hardest way possible by tragically losing her mother in a house fire on 2nd January 2001.

Wendy's elderly mother, Iris Berry, 81, lived alone in Truro and had a smoke alarm fitted in her home. What Iris didn't realise was that her smoke alarm was not in working order because the batteries had been removed. When an electrical fault in the cooker in Iris's kitchen started a slow burning fire, which produces a lot of smoke but not flame, there was nothing to warn Iris of the danger that she was in.

Wendy, who cared for Iris, was trying to contact her by phone and became anxious when Iris didn't answer. She and her husband decided to pop round to check Iris was all right. On opening the front door Wendy's husband was confronted by thick billowing smoke, too heavy for him to battle through to find Iris. Mr Long had no choice but to back away and run to call the fire brigade.

Firefighters quickly arrived at the house and following directions from Wendy were able to locate Iris in the lounge. Iris was unconscious and was rushed to the local hospital by paramedics. Despite their best efforts, Iris did not regain consciousness. Wendy had lost her mother. Sadly, firefighters also found the bodies of Iris's three dogs and one of her cats. Firefighters at the scene battled with the blaze and managed to save Iris's other cat, Whisky.

For everybody involved in the fire this was a terrible disaster. For Wendy, the most desperate part of the whole tragedy was the fact that it could have been prevented.

"Mum had a correctly fitted smoke alarm, but there were no batteries in there. If only I'd known I would have made sure that the alarm was in working order because it definitely would have saved her life."

For Wendy, nothing can bring back her mother, but she can seek some comfort in warning others about neglecting or not fitting smoke alarms.

"It is such a small thing to do, buying and fitting a smoke alarm and checking the batteries regularly. I really do hope that other people realise that smoke alarms save lives. If the death of my mother saves others it will be some comfort to us all, I would hate anyone to go through the terrible experience I have had."

## **Case study 6 - the Smiths, West Sussex**

Up until May this year, Simon Smith had thought very little about the smoke alarms that were in his family's three-storey home when they moved in.

"If I'm honest, I didn't really pay much attention to them or check the batteries were working," said Simon. But in May, Simon came close to losing his family and their home when it was gutted by a ferocious fire. It was then that Simon realised just how important smoke alarms are.

In the early hours of May 10th, Simon, who slept on the top floor of the West Sussex property, was woken by his wife Penny. Penny had heard the smoke alarm go off on the floor below.

"Our daughters, Megan, 14, and Brittany, 8, sleep on the floor below, so Penny told me to go down and check everything was OK," said Simon. As Simon came down the stairs he could see smoke coming up from the ground floor. Simon called out to Penny, who was waking their youngest son, Luke, 3. Penny was also checking out a bedroom window as a possible escape route should the stairwell be filled with smoke. Simon woke Megan and Brittany and took them out of the house to safety.

Whilst outside with Megan and Brittany, Simon spotted some passers-by and called out to them to phone the fire brigade. It appeared that the smoke alarm was sounding in the kitchen where the fire had started because of a fault in the fridge. The alarm was heard by surrounding houses, and alerted them to the emergency.

Simon then turned his attention to Penny and Luke. "I expected to see them behind me, outside the house and safe. When they weren't to be seen, I just didn't think and went back into the house. I know now what a terrible risk I was taking, but it's hard to think straight when you're scared." By now the smoke was thick and black and filling the house rapidly. Penny and Luke had been beaten back by its intensity and had remained on the top floor.

Simon battled back up the stairs to Penny and Luke, but there was no way the three of them could get out by the same route. It was time for Penny's alternative escape plan. Simon pushed open a dormer window and helped Penny and Luke through, he then followed. They then slid carefully down the roof tiles and managed to drop down onto the flat roof of the kitchen extension below. Luckily a passer-by had spotted them and was on the roof ready to help.

Following their ordeal, paramedics took Penny and Luke to hospital for treatment. The effects of smoke inhalation can be fatal, so they needed to be thoroughly checked out. Thankfully, they were released after a couple of hours; however, had it not been for the smoke alarms, it could have been a very different story.

"There were smoke alarms in the kitchen, ground floor hall and living room, in the hall on the girls' floor and we had one on our floor," said Simon. "I cannot tell you how thankful



we all are for those alarms. Although our home has been severely damaged by the fire, we're all alive and well. Without those smoke alarms I hate to think what could have happened."

The Smiths' home is currently being renovated following the fire, but top on the list of new equipment? "Definitely smoke alarms, for under a fiver they are life savers," said Simon.



## Case study 7 - the Millers, Croydon

"We're happy to be alive, thanks to the smoke alarm."

The Lawrence-Millers of Croydon owe their lives to the smoke alarm installed by Tony Lawrence-Miller at his wife Val's insistence, after she saw a television commercial for fire safety.

Tony had never really wanted a smoke alarm. "I hadn't wanted one in the house because they're forever going off when you're making toast or cooking sausages" he said, but for under a fiver, Val thought it stupid not to get one.

Tony thought he was justified when, a few days later, the smoke alarm went off in the middle of the night. "I thought it was bleeping for the fun of it, but as I went down the stairs I could see smoke at the bottom," remembers Tony. "Then I saw flames coming through the kitchen door."

Hearing Tony yell "Get out of the house, we've got a fire," Val woke their stepdaughter Helen and together they made their way through the smoke - so thick by this time that they could barely see a thing - down the stairs and out the front door to safety. Their relief at being safe was soon shattered when they realised that Gizmo, their dog, who usually slept in the kitchen, was missing.

Luckily though, as they were phoning the fire brigade to attend to the fire, Gizmo came trotting out the front door, to their great delight.

The story doesn't end there. The Lawrence-Millers' home had to be rebuilt forcing them to move to temporary accommodation but they are just happy to be alive, thanks to the smoke alarm, says Val. It could have been a very different story, though, and Tony admits he was "100% wrong" about smoke alarms. "I've been lucky - I should have put them in years ago. But a lot of people aren't lucky like me."



## Case study 8 - the Ghumans

A fire can start in the most unlikely of places. A relaxing evening bath nearly turned into tragedy for the Ghuman's earlier this year when a potentially explosive fire started in their bathroom. Thankfully for Aimee and Rattan Ghuman their smoke alarm helped them escape before it was too late.

Rattan Ghuman, 20, had decided to take a bath in his Reading home, it was late in the evening and he had lit a scented candle and placed tea-lights along the side of the plastic bath. Rattan extinguished the candle and snuffed out the tea-lights when he got out but what he didn't know was that one of the tea lights did not quite go out, remaining active and smouldering.

Some time later, whilst Rattan and Aimee, also 20, were sitting watching TV in the lounge, the smoke alarm in the hall began to sound. "Since we moved into the flat in January the alarm had never gone off, not even as a result of cooking, so Rattan and I were immediately suspicious."

However, the Ghuman's first thought was to check the kitchen, "We just assumed it must be something happening in the kitchen, either I'd left a gas ring on or there might have been a dish forgotten in the oven. I never thought for a moment there could be a fire in the bathroom."

Once they had thoroughly checked out the kitchen, Aimee and Rattan went back into the hall. It was then that Aimee spotted the smoke curling under the bathroom door. The flat was also fitted with fire doors and Aimee also knew enough about fire safety to remember that these doors should be kept shut. "I knew we shouldn't open the door, so Rattan and I just grabbed the cordless phone and ran downstairs." Once they were safely out of the house, they called the fire brigade.

Sub Officer Andy Ginn, who attended the fire, said, "The fire started from a tea light on the side of the bath. As the bath was plastic, it started to melt very quickly and produced a tremendous amount of smoke. As in most people's bathrooms, there were a number of aerosol products in there; this fire had the potential to be explosive. The smoke alarm in the hall definitely saved the Ghuman's from a very nasty and dangerous fire."

Aimee went on to say, "It was fairly late at night when it all happened, without the smoke alarm to alert us we could have gone to bed without realising a fire had started. Although we didn't fit the smoke alarm, I test the alarm regularly. Our bathroom has been totally ruined, but Rattan and I are safe and we were definitely saved by the smoke alarm."