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Fire Research Note

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RECOGNITION OF FIRE RISKS DEPICTED IN A DRAWING

by

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February 1968.

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SUMMARY

Entries for a competition requiring the encircling of fire risks depicted in a drawing have been analysed. The analysis indicates that there are many people who are not aware of certain risks, e.g. mirror over mantelpiece, flex under carpet.

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MINISTRY OF TECHNOLOGY AND FIRE OFFICES' COMMITTEE
JOINT FIRE RESEARCH ORGANIZATION

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INTRODUCTION

During the 1967 "Make Leicester Fire-safe" campaign, a competition was organised in which entrants were required to mark each feature that they considered to represent a fire risk in a simple drawing of the interior of a room.

It was felt that the risks marked by competitors would indicate the appreciation of specific fire hazards by the general public. Accordingly, after the competition, a random sample of 100 of the entry forms was analysed out of the total of about 1 800 received.

THE ENTRANTS

The competition was open to anyone except Fire Officers and their families, members of the Make Leicester Fire-safe Committee and anyone connected with the competition. About two-thirds of the entrants appeared to be female.

Table 1

Titles by which entrants described themselves

"Mrs"	39
"Miss"	9
Female forename only (children?)	14
Name and address omitted	1
Initials only (men??)	9
Male forename only (including some children)	12
"Mr."	<u>16</u>
	100

THE COMPETITION

Some 90 000 pamphlets giving general fire prevention advice and including the competition were prepared by the Central Office of Information, and about 87 500 were distributed in Leicester, mainly by Scouts, but also through the Standing Conference of Women's Organisations, City Libraries, Fire Prevention Exhibitions etc.

About 1 100 entries were received from this source.

In addition the competition appeared in the evening "Leicester Mercury", as a result of which a further 700 entries were received.

Successful competitors could win a gas-fired central heating installation worth £225 and "many other valuable prizes", in return for drawing a circle round each risk depicted and writing an original fire prevention slogan in not more than twelve words.

The sample of 100 forms analysed was selected at random from the entries received in response to the pamphlet only.

RISKS DEPICTED IN DRAWING

As an example, a frayed wire on a table lamp was encircled. Nine other fairly obvious fire hazards were depicted in the drawing.

FIRE RISKS IDENTIFIED BY ENTRANTS

Table 2

Numbers (percentages) of entrants identifying each risk

Electric iron left switched on in flat position on ironing board	100
Cigarette left burning balanced on edge of ashtray	99
Electric socket connected to four leads	98
Matchbox left open in hearth	97
Absence of fireguard on open fire	89
Clothes airing near fire	80
Lead to iron plugged in to light socket	71
Flex laid under carpet	51
Mirror fixed over mantelpiece	36

Two "unofficial" risks were ringed by a large proportion of the entrants:-

Table lamp on mantelpiece	41
Potted plant on mantelpiece	32

Some discretion had to be used in deciding what was in competitors' minds when rings were placed in certain places. In a few instances it was impossible to deduce what was intended, as when for example a ring was placed on curtains, or the leg of an armchair.

DISCUSSION

Bearing in mind the straightforward nature of the competition, a remarkable proportion of the entrants failed to indicate apparently obvious fire hazards. The conclusion seems inescapable that they are not widely recognised as such.

Plugging an electric iron into a light socket may not overload the fuse, but will tend to cause undue wear and tear on the flex supporting the socket. (In addition, an electric shock is more likely because of the lack of an earth).

Unless flex laid under a carpet is unusually well protected, it will tend to be forgotten, trodden on and worn, in which condition it may well start a fire.

Anything that encourages people to stand in front of, and near, a fire is undesirable in that their clothing is likely to catch light. A mirror is the most frequently quoted example, which however apparently passed unnoticed by a majority of the competition entrants. That a minority of some 40 per cent nevertheless understood the principle seems confirmed by the identification of a table lamp (requiring switching on and off) and a potted plant (requiring watering, if not plastic) on the mantelpiece as fire risks.

CONCLUSIONS

It seems possible that a mirror installed over a fireplace is not recognised as a fire risk by a majority of the population.

The laying of electric flex under carpets, and the plugging of electric irons into light sockets, do not seem to be recognised as fire risks by a substantial minority of the population.

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