

# **Report to the Tyne and Wear Trading Standards Joint Committee**

**22 February 2018**

## **Update on the Voluntary Ban on the Sale of Corrosive Substances**

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### **Purpose of the report**

To update the Committee on the response provided nationally to the safety issues which concern the safety of corrosive substances.

### **The Safety Issue**

1. In March 2016 to April 2017, police recorded more than 500 attacks in England and Wales, double the number five years ago, with the majority of incidents in London.
2. However it is feared that the true level of acid crimes may be much higher than official records show. A Freedom of Information request submitted by the BBC found the Metropolitan Police alone recorded more than 450 noxious or corrosive fluid incidents in London in 2016.
3. A Home Office analysis estimated the true national rate could be as high as 900 crimes a year.
4. The Home has also said experts at the University of Leicester are beginning detailed research into the characteristics and motivations of attackers.
5. Acid or other corrosive chemicals have been a weapon in a range of crimes, including revenge, so-called "honour crimes", gang violence and theft from delivery drivers.
6. In one of the most serious recent cases, a man who threw acid in a packed London nightclub, injuring 22 people, was jailed for 20 years. Another man is facing trial later this year for the alleged murder of a woman who died after she was splashed with a corrosive substance.

### **Consultation**

7. The Government issued a consultation in October 2017 on a proposal to introduce new legislation to tackle offensive and dangerous weapons.

### **Response to the Consultation**

8. A response to the consultation was submitted on behalf of the region by the North East Trading Standards Association.

## **Retailers Announcement**

9. In January 2018 quite a few of the UK's largest retailers agreed to voluntarily stop sales of acids to customers under 18 years old.
10. A number of DIY stores and supermarkets including "B&Q", "Screwfix" and "Wickes" have signed up to the ban, which will apply to some corrosive substances, including concentrated acids.
11. The Home Office has already proposed new laws to limit the sale of corrosive substances amid continuing concern over rising numbers of acid attacks.
12. A fifth of the acid attackers identified in 2016/2017 were under 18 years old.
13. The proposed legislation would make it unlawful to sell the substances to under-18s, and also make it a criminal offence to be in possession of acid in a public place without good reason.
14. The restrictions will apply to drain cleaners containing sulphuric acid, as well as paint strippers, limescale removers and other cleaning products with an acid concentration of more than 10% or 12%.
15. Staff will be expected to challenge buyers to prove their age in the same way that they do for solvents, spray paints and knives.

## **Recommendation**

16. The Committee is asked to note the information as contained within the report.