

Press release: Highways England warns of litter risk in soaring temperatures

With dry conditions on roadside verges, items thrown from passing vehicles such as glass bottles, cigarette butts and plastic can spark fires.

There have been 56 fires recorded on grass verges across England in the past 10 days near to the motorway and major A-road network managed by Highways England.

Recently, on the M5 in the Midlands, Highways England worked with the emergency services to support a serious fire involving a HGV that was carrying hay. The incident took place on the southbound carriageway last Thursday afternoon between junction 7 (Worcester south) and Strensham Services.

As well as having to deal with the fire on the vehicle and one on the carriageway, crews also had to damp down the nearby woods and a field beyond that, highlighting the scale of the problem.

Highways England emergency planning officer, Frank Bird, said:

Smoke from roadside fires can drift across motorways posing a hazard to drivers. We've seen an increase in fires on grass verges near some of our motorways, for example on the M42 in the Midlands.

With the land being so dry, it often only takes a small spark to take hold. We'd urge people to avoid throwing any items from vehicles at any time, but particularly in these hot conditions. Please take all of your litter home with you or dispose of it in a proper manner.

West Midlands Fire Service Station Commander, Marc Hudson, said:

As people would have seen across the country fire services have been dealing with a large number of grass and outdoor fires, many of these are easily prevented by people taking extra care in these very dry conditions.

With the hot, dry weather, any glass object has the potential to refract the sun's light and it's so easy for a fire to start from a discarded cigarette.

Littering at the side of the road significantly increases the risk of fire and has the potential to tie up valuable resources that could be used elsewhere which in turn could put people's lives at risk.

While Highways England clears litter, picking it up close to fast-moving traffic puts road workers at risk. It is also unsightly as well as a risk to wildlife and the environment. The company urges road users to take their litter home and are working with partners such as Keep Britain Tidy to tackle the problem at source and make littering socially unacceptable.

Every year, Highways England removes about 200,000 sacks of litter from across our motorways. Clearing litter from busy roads such as motorways is a huge challenge costing time and money which could be better spent on other priorities.

Drivers travelling in this heat wave are being advised to:

- take a bottle of water with them before setting out to ensure they stay hydrated
- plan and leave plenty of time for their journeys
- check the weather forecast for their destination
- check travel conditions before setting out and, where it is safe to do so, during journeys
- ensure their cars are fit for the journey

Figures for fires on grass verges across England in the past 10 days near to the motorway and major A-road network managed by Highways England:

East region – total of 12 incidents

Road Incidents

M25 6
A11 1
M40 1
A1M 2
M4 2

West Midlands region – total of 7 incidents

Road Incidents

M42 2
M5 3
M6 2

South East region – total of 11 incidents

Road Incidents

M2 1
M20 2
M3 2
M23 1
A20 1
A2 3

Road Incidents

M25 1

North East region – total of 16 incidents

Road Incidents

M62 9

M621 1

M1 3

A180 1

A1M 2

North West Region – total of 2 incidents

Road Incidents

M60 1

M61 1

East Midlands Region – total of 4 incidents

Road Incidents

M1 2

A57 1

A1 1

South West Region – total of 4 incidents

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.