

## Isaac Hogarth in product liability inquest: HM Coroner finds Hotpoint dishwasher is cause of fatal fire

Isaac Hogarth, instructed by Barlow Robbins, represented the family of the deceased, Elizabeth Griffin, at an inquest before HM Senior Coroner for Inner West London, Dr Fiona Wilcox.

The Coroner found that a faulty component in a Hotpoint dishwasher which had been previously identified as a fire hazard, and was on recall, was the cause of the fatal fire. The Coroner has indicated that she will be making a number of recommendations under her regulation 28 duty.

### ***The Facts***

Mrs Griffin suffered from multiple sclerosis and diabetes, and was wheelchair bound. She could mobilise with assistance, but could not move on her own. She lived in a housing association flat and was a subscriber to Wandsworth WATCH alarms. She thereby had an emergency pendant which she kept on her person. When she triggered an emergency call, it opened up a line with Wandsworth Council via an intercom unit at one end of her property.

On 14 July 2013, she was at home alone in bed, at the other end of her property to her WATCH intercom, when her Hotpoint dishwasher caught fire. She pressed the emergency pendant. The call operator at Wandsworth failed to identify the sound of the smoke detectors sounding in the background, and was not able to establish contact with Mrs Griffin. She then made a call to Mrs Griffin's landline which went unanswered, and a call to Mrs Griffin's husband, who was not at home. She did not, however, call the fire brigade.

The fire brigade was called some minutes later by an estates community assistant, who was on site. The fire brigade attended within seven minutes of the call, and two firemen entered wearing breathing apparatus. They had not been informed on arrival that there was anyone inside the building.

The fire was located in the kitchen and successfully extinguished. The fire brigade was then informed that Mrs Griffin was inside. She was rescued very shortly thereafter.

She had suffered cardiac arrest, and was given CPR by the fire brigade and then by the ambulance service. She was conveyed to hospital. Whilst she was successfully resuscitated, and was neurologically intact, she had such low psychological reserve due to her underlying health conditions, that the insult suffered due to smoke inhalation was sadly ultimately fatal.

The evidence was that the fire had started at the printed circuit board of the Hotpoint dishwasher. This was a known fault, and the model had been on recall at the time of the fire.

### ***The Inquest***

In addition to the family, interested persons were Whirlpool (owner of Hotpoint) and Wandsworth. Evidence was taken from a number of witnesses, including the former CEO of Whirlpool, Maurizio Pettorino.

HM Coroner reached a conclusion of accident. She has indicated that she will be making a number of recommendations under regulation 28 of the Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013, which will cover a broad range of issues, including:

1. Training of emergency response officers employed by local authorities under sheltered or assisted housing schemes;
2. The provision of smoke detectors (and other fire safety devices) which are linked to such systems;
3. The length of time between faults being identified and products going on recall;
4. Steps taken to encourage registration of white goods such that customers can more effectively be contacted in the event a fault is identified.

Isaac Hogarth represented the family, instructed by Emma Potter of Barlow Robbins.