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KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR YOUR OLDER NEIGHBOURS DURING THE WINTER MONTHS

After the shocking announcement that the number of excess deaths during the winter months in England and Wales has increased by 49% on the previous year¹, the national charity, Counsel and Care, recognises the importance of launching its updated advice and information on how to stay warm and safe, and alert to the needs of more vulnerable older people during the winter months.

Despite the relatively mild start to the winter, the risks remain for frail older people living alone or on fixed incomes from low temperatures or unexpected changes in the weather. It is vital that older people are able to prepare properly for a cold snap. Every year, people over 75 experience the greatest increase in deaths directly associated with the winter months². Much more should be done to prevent this happening.

Counsel and Care's guide 26: '**Health difficulties caused by hot and cold weather**' covers the following topics:

¹ There were 36,700 excess deaths during the period of December- March 2008/09, an increase of 49% or over 12,000 on the previous year's total. (Office of National Statistics, November 2009)

² In the winter of 2008/09 there were 29,400 more deaths among those aged 75 and over, compared with levels in the non-winter period. In contrast, there were 7,300 excess winter deaths among those under the age of 75. (Office of National Statistics, November 2009)

- practical steps that can be taken now to prepare for the winter months
- government grants such as Winter Fuel Payments, Warm Front Grants, Cold Weather Payments and how to apply for them
- how to heat a home efficiently.

Stephen Burke, Chief Executive of Counsel and Care, said: “The huge increase in excess winter deaths last year on the previous figures is shocking news, and must alert everyone to take urgent action to ensure that the most vulnerable older people in our society are safe and warm in times of cold weather. It is a disgrace that there has been such a massive growth in the number of largely preventable deaths amongst older people.

“We want to make sure that all those older people who are currently struggling to meet high costs of fuel bills claim their Winter Fuel Payment and receive advice about how to access support with heating their homes effectively.

“More relevant than ever, Counsel and Care’s guide raises public awareness to ensure people take action now to remain safe and well during the winter months.”

-ENDS-

NOTES TO EDITORS

- Copies of Counsel and Care’s winter guide for older people 26: ‘Health difficulties caused by hot and cold weather’ can be downloaded from the website at: www.counselandcare.org.uk/helping-you, or ordered by calling our publication orderline on 020 7241 8522, leaving details of your name and address.
- The Office of National Statistics report can be found at:

- <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/ci/nugget.asp?id=574>
- Met Office Weather predictions for Winter 2009-10 can be found at:
<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/science/creating/monthsahead/seasonal/2009/winter.html>
 - Counsel and Care is a national charity working with older people, their families and carers to get the best care and support. Advice on issues affecting older people and carers can be obtained by calling 0845 300 7585 or emailing advice@counselandcare.org.uk
 - Counsel and Care's Advice Service opening hours are 10am-4pm Monday-Friday except Wednesday afternoons.
 - More information about Counsel and Care can be obtained from www.counselandcare.org.uk