

DOMESTIC BONFIRES

A Guide to Good Practice

Bonfires can cause real annoyance and nuisance to neighbours and we strongly discourage them. The Environmental Health Department receives many complaints every year from members of the public who are upset by smoke from bonfires thoughtlessly lit by their neighbours. Unpleasant smells and ash deposits can ruin your neighbours' washing and spoil their enjoyment of their houses and gardens. Smoke can also be very distressing, especially if the person suffers from asthma or similar conditions.

Before you light a bonfire, ask yourself is it really necessary?

Most garden waste can be composted and will provide valuable humus for the garden. Waste material should be recycled or disposed of at your nearest civic amenity site or placed in your Brown Bin if you have one.

If you are determined to have a bonfire, here are some guidelines to minimise the risk of it becoming a serious nuisance:

- Choose the site and time for your bonfire carefully, taking notice of those living nearby.
- Never light a bonfire unless you are satisfied that weather conditions and wind direction will mean that smoke will be carried away from your neighbours' windows and gardens – if it's misty or damp, the bonfire will smoulder and produce excessive smoke; if it's windy, smoke may blow into neighbouring properties and across roads; if the air is still, smoke will linger at low levels.
- Make sure that there is no laundry drying in any neighbouring gardens.
- Only put dry material on the bonfire that will burn quickly and with the minimum of smoke.
- Compost or bury soft vegetable waste and grass cuttings, etc, which are difficult to dry
- Never burn oily rags, rubber, plastics, foam, paint or such materials as they will produce heavy or pungent smoke.
- Never use flammable liquids such as oil or petrol to help start your bonfire.
- Remember – bonfires are dangerous; never leave them unattended. Do not even leave them when they are smouldering – douse them with water if necessary. Fire can spread to fences or buildings and scorch trees and plants.
- Let your neighbours enjoy their time off from work do not burn at weekends or on bank holidays.

Nuisance

If the smoke, fly ash or gritty particles associated with a commercial bonfire cause a nuisance to other people then this is a statutory nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The Council can serve a notice to abate the nuisance (stop it) or prevent it happening again. If the person responsible does not comply with this notice then they can be fined up to **£20,000**.

Proper Disposal

Instead of burning materials you must arrange for them to be taken away to a proper waste disposal site. **DO NOT BE TEMPTED TO FLY TIP.** This is a serious offence under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and carries a maximum penalty of **£20,000** and up to 6 months imprisonment in the Magistrates Court, or unlimited fines and up to 2 years imprisonment at Crown Court. The maximum sentence is even higher (5 years) for dumping special waste which may be harmful to health.

You can either take the waste yourself or arrange a waste carrier to take it for you. If you use someone else then you have a duty to ensure that they are an authorised carrier. They will arrange for you to complete and sign a transfer note. This is so that no-one can arrange to take waste from other people and then dump it illegally. If this happened then the contractor and the person employing them would be held partly responsible under the law unless they had properly checked the waste carrier's credentials and signed a transfer note.

Details of alternative methods of waste disposal can be found at www.wasteaware.org.uk. If you require further information about the Council's garden waste collection then, call 01707 357000, or e-mail contact-whc@welhat.gov.uk

To find out more about businesses' responsibilities under the Environmental Protection Act and to check if your service provider is registered, visit the Environment Agency website.

Complaints about a persistent nuisance caused by regular bonfires can be referred to the Public Health and Protection on 01707 357 242.

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