

## **GARDEN BONFIRES**

The bonfire gets its name from medieval "bone-fires" of animal bones - and while modern day bonfire ingredients may not be as gruesome, they still cause pollution and local nuisance. Bonfires may be fun, but they are not usually the most environmentally friendly way of getting rid of your rubbish.

### **What's wrong with a good old-fashioned bonfire?**

Bonfires can be very irritating to neighbours - the smoke, smuts and smell are the subject of many complaints to local authorities. Smoke prevents your neighbours from enjoying their gardens, opening windows or hanging washing out, and reduces visibility in the neighbourhood and on roads.

Bonfires cause air pollution. Burning garden waste produces smoke, especially if it is damp and smouldering rather than dry and blazing. Like tobacco smoke, this will contain the poisonous gas carbon monoxide and other noxious or irritating compounds. Burning plastic, rubber or painted materials not only creates an unpleasant smell but also produces a range of poisonous compounds. The compounds can all have damaging health effects, but if exposure to bonfire smoke is short-lived, serious harm is unlikely. Problems may be caused for asthmatics, bronchitis sufferers, those with heart conditions or children. Even if the immediate health risk is small, your bonfire will be adding to the general background level of air pollution. Air quality in the UK often hits the official "poor" level - do you really want to make it worse?

Weather conditions affect air quality. If the air is still, particularly in the late afternoon or evening, smoke will linger. A dry blazing bonfire will lift smoke and fumes upwards. If it is too windy, smoke may blow into neighbouring properties and across roads causing annoyance or danger.

Remember, bonfires are dangerous. Fire can spread to fences or buildings and scorch trees and plants. Exploding bottles and cans are also a hazard when rubbish is burned. Piles of garden waste are often used as a refuge by animals, so look out for hibernating hedgehogs, toads and sleeping pets.

### **What's the Legal Position?**

Many people assume that there are specific byelaws to prohibit bonfires. There aren't in this area. If used sensitively, the occasional bonfire should not cause a major problem and an outright ban would be unreasonable. It would be difficult to enforce and occasionally a bonfire is the best practicable way to dispose of garden waste. However if a neighbour is causing a nuisance by burning rubbish, the law is on your side. Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, a statutory nuisance includes "smoke, fumes or gases emitted from premises so as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance". In practice, to be considered a nuisance, a bonfire would have

to be a regular problem and interfering substantially with your well-being, comfort or enjoyment of your property.

If you are bothered by persistent bonfire smoke it is best to approach your neighbour first and explain the problem. You might feel awkward, but they may not be aware of the distress they are causing and it will hopefully make them more considerate in the future. If this approach fails, contact us for further advice. We will take reasonable steps to investigate your complaint and can take action under the Environmental Protection Act by issuing a nuisance abatement notice. The same Act allows you to take private action in the Magistrates' Court.

Remember, if the fire is only occasional this is unlikely to be considered a nuisance. Similarly, if you are being troubled by a series of bonfires from different neighbours, each one of whom only burns occasionally; this may not be considered a nuisance. In this situation all you can do is encourage them to consider the alternatives. Finally, under the Highways Act 1980 anyone lighting a fire and allowing smoke to drift across a road faces a fine if it endangers traffic. Contact the police in this case.

### **What's the Alternative?**

Disposal methods far less environmentally damaging than bonfires are available.

### **Compost and Recycling**

Most garden and kitchen waste - even cardboard and paper - can be recycled into compost. Rather than burning garden waste or putting food waste in the dustbin where it will end up buried or incinerated, a compost bin will produce a useful soil conditioner, saving money on commercial products.

Woody waste can be shredded to make it suitable for composting or mulching; you can buy or hire shredders and some allotment societies have their own. However shredders can be noisy - so don't replace one nuisance with another.

Further advice on composting is available on the composting pages of our website.

Household waste should certainly not be burned on a bonfire. Many items can now be recycled. Further advice on recycling is available on the recycling pages of our website.

### **Collection**

Waste can be taken to the [local amenity site](#). If you can't take your waste to an amenity site, we will remove them for a small charge. Further information is available on [Bulky Waste and Furniture](#).

## **But I Like Bonfires...**

A bonfire can be a convenient way of getting rid of a large amount of waste, or perhaps you want a bonfire just for fun; on Guy Fawkes Night for instance. Some people simply like making fires - perhaps it's part of human nature! If you must have a bonfire, it is only fair to warn your neighbours (and they are much less likely to complain if you do). Remember that bonfire parties can cause noise as well as smoke - a good reason for letting them know in advance. And don't save up your old junk to burn on bonfire night - why not go to an organised event instead?

## **Good Bonfire Guidelines**

So you can't resist it. If you are determined to have a bonfire, follow these guidelines and the chances are you won't cause a serious nuisance.

- Only burn dry material
- Never burn household rubbish, rubber tyres, or anything containing plastic, foam or paint.
- Never use old engine oil, meths or petrol to light the fire or to encourage it.
- Avoid lighting a fire in unsuitable weather conditions - smoke hangs in the air on damp, still days and in the evening. If it is windy, smoke may be blown into neighbour's gardens and across roads.
- Avoid burning at weekends and on bank holidays when people want to enjoy their gardens.
- Avoid burning when the air quality in your area is "poor" or "very poor".
- Never leave a fire unattended or leave it to smoulder - douse it with water if necessary.

For further advice or assistance, please call us on **01636 655606** or e-mail [environmental.services@nsdc.info](mailto:environmental.services@nsdc.info)