

Garden Bonfires

Advice to Householders



Bonfires

The word 'bonfire' is medieval: 'bone fires - a large open-air fire used for burning bones and/or as part of a celebration', and while modern day garden bonfires may not be so gruesome, they can cause pollution and be a localised nuisance to neighbours. In particular this can be a problem to anyone suffering from asthma or bronchial problems.

Bonfires can be very irritating to neighbours – the smoke, smell and particles emitted are the subject of many complaints to local authorities. These emissions can ruin neighbours' enjoyment of their gardens, prevent them from opening windows or hanging out washing.

There is no doubt that bonfires cause air pollution; burning garden waste will produce smoke, especially if it is damp and smouldering rather than dry and blazing. Burning plastic, rubber or painted materials not only produces smoke and smells but can also produce a range of dangerous chemical emissions.

What can you do about your neighbours bonfire?

If your neighbour's bonfire disturbs you, the first thing to do is to approach the neighbour, where practical. Politely explain that the smoke is disturbing you and ask them to stop burning or to move the site of their bonfire to a less sensitive location.

If the personal approach does not work you can complain to the Council and an officer will investigate your complaint. The Council will take formal action if a statutory nuisance is found to exist.

Are bonfires necessary?

Although bonfires are a traditional method for disposing of garden rubbish, they are no longer considered to be the most environmentally friendly option.

Composting is the most environmentally friendly way to dispose of garden waste.

Recycling garden waste

Garden waste is collected for recycling as part of the Council's Refuse and Recycling Service. The garden waste collected is composted and used as a soil conditioner.

The Scheme is district wide and collections take place on a fortnightly basis direct from householders, using wheeled bins.

Garden waste is accepted free of charge at all Household Waste Recycling Centres where it is treated and recycled. Details of locations and opening times contact Cambridgeshire County Council on 0345 045 5207 or look, under the heading Recycling Centres', on our website.

Before you have a bonfire, please consider alternative ways of disposing of your garden refuse.

Lighting bonfires

If you must have a bonfire please observe the 'good bonfire rules':

- ◆ Consider your neighbours.
- ◆ Site the bonfire away from other properties.
- ◆ Keep the bonfire to a manageable size.
- ◆ Burn only dry material.
- ◆ Do not burn household rubbish, tyres, plastic or paint, etc.
- ◆ Never leave a bonfire unattended.
- ◆ Douse fire once material is consumed by the fire to avoid smouldering.
- ◆ Avoid bonfires when your neighbours have washing out.
- ◆ Avoid burning when the wind will carry smoke over roads or into neighbours' gardens.
- ◆ Never use oil, methylated spirit or petrol etc to light a bonfire.
- ◆ Avoid unsuitable weather conditions - smoke hangs in the air on damp, still days and in the evenings.
- ◆ Avoid burning at weekends or bank holidays when people most want to enjoy their gardens.

REMEMBER - It is an offence to cause a NUISANCE from lighting bonfires

The law

There are no national laws or local by-laws which prohibit or control the times at which bonfires can be lit.

If used sensibly, following the good bonfire rules, an occasional small garden bonfire should not cause a problem and therefore an outright ban would be unreasonable.

However, if a neighbour is continually having bonfires which affect the reasonable enjoyment of your property, the law is on your side.

Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 it is an offence to cause a Statutory Nuisance and smoke from a garden bonfire can constitute such an offence if it is interfering substantially with your well-being, comfort or enjoyment of property.

How will your complaint be investigated?

The Council will take reasonable steps to investigate your complaint and your co-operation will be essential.

You may be asked to keep a log of events and it is important that you fill in the form supplied accurately and truthfully. This will be used in evidence if legal proceedings are necessary.

On completion of the investigation you will be advised of the outcome and any further actions which may be possible.

Further information

Should you wish to report a nuisance from a neighbour's bonfire or you require further advice please contact us:

Environmental and Community Health Services
Huntingdonshire District Council
Pathfinder House
St Mary's Street
Huntingdon
PE29 3TN

Tel: 01480 388302
Email: envhealth@huntingdonshire.gov.uk
Website: www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

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