

What's Wrong with Bonfires?

- **Air Pollution**

Burning garden waste produces smoke- especially if that waste is green or damp. This will emit harmful pollutants including particles and dioxins. Burning plastic, rubber or painted objects creates noxious fumes that give off a range of poisonous compounds.

- **Health Effects**

Air pollution can have damaging health effects, and people with existing health problems are especially vulnerable, e.g. asthmatics, bronchitis sufferers, people with heart conditions, children and the elderly.

- **Annoyance**

Smoke smuts and smell from bonfires have long been a source of a significant number of complaints to local authorities. Smoke prevents neighbours from enjoying their gardens, opening windows or hanging washing and reduces visibility in the neighbourhood and on roads.

- **Safety**

Fire can spread to hedgerows, fields, fences or buildings

Exploding bottles and cans are a hazard when rubbish is burned. Piles of garden waste are often used as a refuge to animals, so it is important to look out for sleeping pets and hibernating wildlife!



What's the Alternative?

- **Composting**

Rather than burning garden waste or putting food waste in the dustbin, where it will be incinerated a compost bin will produce useful soil conditioner, saving money on commercially available products. The Isle of Wight Council's contractor does this via their weekly refuse collections.

Woody waste can be shredded to make it suitable for mulching or composting. Shredders can be purchased, whilst some allotment associations have their own. If using a shredder be considerate- as they are very noisy, so don't swap one nuisance for another!

- **Recycling**

Household waste should not be burnt. Most items can be recycled or reused. For information on what services are available locally please contact the Isle of Wight Council on **01983 821000**.

Burning old furniture can cause particular hazards, as some materials can release toxic fumes when burnt. If furniture is in reasonable condition charitable organisations can collect and reuse unwanted items.

Bonfires and the Law

- **When and Where Can I have a bonfire?**

It is a common misconception that there are specific byelaws prohibiting garden bonfires or specifying times they can be lit- There aren't! However, this is not a licence for indiscriminate burning! Occasionally a bonfire is the best way to dispose of woody or diseased waste that cannot be composted. And bonfires are used to mark traditional celebrations like 5th November.

Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, it is an offence for people to dispose of their domestic waste in a way likely to cause pollution of the environment or harm to human health. In practice you should not burn waste that is likely to create excessive smoke or noxious fumes. If only dry garden waste is burnt your bonfire should not cause a problem.

Most bonfire problems are addressed under nuisance legislation. Under the Environmental Protection Act, a statutory nuisance includes 'smoke, fumes or gases emitted from premises, so as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance'. In practice a fire would be a recurrent persistent problem, interfering substantially with neighbours' well-being, comfort or enjoyment of their property.

If a bonfire of industrial or commercial waste is emitting black smoke, it is dealt with under the Clean Air Act 1993- This includes the burning of material in your garden! Under Section 34 of the Environmental Protection Act it is illegal to dispose of waste that is not from your property- for example from your workplace or from a neighbour. For example small tradesmen are not permitted to burn waste from site at home.

- **How do I complain about a bonfire?**

If bothered by smoke, approach your neighbour and explain the problem. You might feel awkward, but they may not be aware of the harm they are causing and it will hopefully make them more considerate in future. If this fails Environmental Health can be contacted on **01983 823000**.

Environmental Health must investigate your complaint and must issue a notice under the Environmental Protection Act if they consider a nuisance is being caused.

The Act also allows householders to take private action in the Magistrates Court. However, if a fire is a one-off it may be difficult to prove a nuisance. Similarly, if you are troubled by bonfires from different neighbours, each only burning occasionally, a nuisance action would be difficult as there are several offenders.

In this situation encourage them to consider alternatives. Give them a copy of this leaflet!

Finally, under Section 16A of the Highways Act 1980, anyone lighting a fire and allowing smoke to drift across a road faces a fine, if it endangers traffic or causes an injury. Contact the police if this is the case.

Barbecues

Barbecues can also cause an odour problem- Especially when using lighter fuel. Again, be considerate. Warn your neighbours, and don't light up if they have washing out. If it is windy make sure smoke won't blow in to neighbouring properties.

But I like Bonfires...

A bonfire can be a useful way of disposing of garden waste that cannot be composted, or perhaps you want to have a bonfire for fun! Bonfires have traditionally been used to mark events. Currently the main bonfire tradition is Bonfire Night. If you do have a bonfire, or on bonfire night warn your neighbours, and they are less likely to complain.

To assist, follow the Bonfire Guidelines below.

Bonfires Guidelines:

- Only burn dry material.
- Never burn household rubbish, rubber tyres or anything containing plastic, foam or paint.
- Avoid lighting fires in unsuitable weather conditions- smoke hangs in the air on damp, still days. If it is too windy, smoke blows into neighbours' gardens and windows and across roads.
- Avoid burning when air pollution levels are high or very high. You can check air quality on 0800 556677 or at <http://uk-air.defra.gov.uk>
- Keep your fires away from fences, trees, hedgerows and buildings.
- Never use oil, petrol or methylated spirits to light a fire. You could damage yourself, as well as the environment!
- Never leave a fire unattended or leave it to smoulder.

For further information on Garden Bonfires and the law, contact the Isle of Wight Council's **Environmental Health** team on **01983 823000**.

For details on **Waste Collection & Recycling** please contact the **IW Council** on **01983 821000**

Further advice on composting and recycling is available from:

Straight Ltd, No1 Whitehall Riverside, Leeds, LS1 4BN.
Tel: 0844 571 4444 or Email: info@straight.co.uk

Information Department, **Garden Organic**,
Ryton Gardens, Coventry, Warwickshire CV8 3LG
Tel: 024 7630 3517, Email: enquiry@gardenorganic.org.uk



GARDEN BONFIRES



INFORMATION

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