

A bonfire is a traditional method of disposing of waste. If care is not taken as to what is burnt and when and where the fire is lit, a serious nuisance may be caused to neighbours as well as a risk to health. There are no legal restrictions on times that you can have a bonfire but giving due consideration for your neighbours is important.

Toxic Fumes

With more and more plastics in use in the garden and home, toxic fumes may be given off on a bonfire. Seemingly harmless waste can produce toxic fumes particularly if the bonfire is damp and does not burn at sufficiently high temperatures. Similar problems may occur when burning chipboards and plywood.

The fumes and gases produced can have damaging health effects, but because exposure to bonfire smoke is short-lived, serious harm is unlikely. Nevertheless, problems may arise for people such as those with breathing related illnesses and children (who are particularly vulnerable to air pollutants).

Barbecues

The increasingly popular garden barbecue is another potential source of smoke nuisance. If you are having a barbecue, please show consideration for your neighbours and ensure that smoke is not going to cause them a nuisance - it is always nice to let them know in advance so that they can also plan ahead.

Alternatives



Have you looked at the amount of waste you create? Can this be avoided? Reducing waste by buying less packaging and recycling can make a big difference to our environment.

A kerbside recycling service is available to everyone in the District. By using the clear recycling sacks provided, you can recycle plastic bottles and plastic carrier bags; metal tins and cans; aerosols; paper, card and junk mail; cardboard boxes; aluminium foil, newspapers, magazines and catalogues.

Most properties also have a fortnightly collection of garden and vegetable waste. Clothes, shoes, and bric-a-brac can be taken to your local charity shop but please check with them first to see what they will accept. Many charities will also collect furniture.

Other textiles, including rags, should be taken to a textile bank situated at some of our Bring Bank sites.

If you are able to compost at home, garden waste, teabags, eggshells, raw fruit peelings, paper and card can be composted to produce a useful soil conditioner. Essex County Council is running a special offer for home composting bins so please call 0845 077 0759 or visit www.recyclenow.com/compost for more information.

So don't burn your waste, recycle it.

Large and Bulky items of Household Waste

Household items can be taken to one of Essex County Council's Recycling Centres for Household Waste. These are located at Perry Road, Witham; Braintree Road, Shalford; Thaxted Road, Saffron Walden; Maldon Road, Shrub End and Drovers Way, Springfield. For a full list of what can be accepted at each site and their opening times, please visit www.essexcc.gov.uk/wastemanagement or call 0845 603 7625.

Braintree District Council also offers a Special Collection Service for the collection of up to six items and a charge will be applicable to cover the cost of transport and final disposal.

If you have any queries about how and what to recycle in your area or wish to book a special collection, please telephone our Customer Service Centre on 01376 552525 or e-mail csc@braintree.gov.uk for more information and advice.

Nuisance and the Law

The most common problem from bonfires is nuisance. Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Council may serve an Abatement Notice to deal with statutory nuisance caused by smoke emitted from premises. A nuisance is generally considered to be an act which is persistent or likely to recur, is a cause of material harm, or interferes substantially with the well-being, comfort or enjoyment of a neighbour. Prosecution for non-compliance with an Abatement Notice can result in a fine.

Smoke from burning horse soiled straw and manure causes many complaints and can be held to be a statutory nuisance or breach of planning consent.

Smoke can also obscure visibility in the neighbourhood and on the roads. The most common problem from bonfires is nuisance. Under the Highways (Amendment) Act 1986 anyone lighting a fire and allowing smoke to drift across a road faces a fine of up to £2,000. This Act is enforced by the police.

If you are bothered by bonfire smoke, it is best to approach your neighbours first and explain the problem - this can be awkward, but may make them more considerate in the future. (Immediate recourse to the Council may cause animosity.) If you need help to overcome a problem with your neighbours you can contact SEAMS, the mediation service, to assist. They will arrange for a trained mediator to visit you and your neighbour and help you work out a solution which is agreeable to both of you. Call SEAMS on 01376 331511 for further information. If this approach fails, contact the Environmental Services Department. It is essential to keep a record of incidents, and helpful if you have the support of independent witnesses. If the Council is unable to act, a private action can be taken in the Magistrates' Court.

Minimising Nuisance

If you MUST have a bonfire, remember to warn your neighbours, and take the following into account:

- To limit smoke, burn only dry material.
- Never burn household rubbish or rubber tyres, or use oil to light the fire.
- Never light a fire in unsuitable weather conditions - smoke hangs in the air on damp, still days and in the evening.

- Never burn when the wind will carry the smoke over roads or other peoples' property.
- Avoid burning at weekends and on bank holidays when people want to enjoy their gardens.
- Never leave a fire unattended or leave it to smoulder - douse it with water if necessary.

The Fire Brigade also advise that you should build your bonfire away from buildings, garden sheds, fences, hedges etc.

Dark Smoke

Dark smoke from burning industrial or trade waste is an offence, under the Clean Air Act 1993, and may result in a fine and a criminal record!

Dark smoke is created by burning plastics, oil, roofing felt foam etc. and is toxic to the environment and individuals. Businesses should have proper trade waste agreements for their disposal requirements

For further information contact:
**The Environmental Services Dept,
Braintree District Council,
Causeway House, Braintree,
Essex, CM7 9HB
Telephone: (01376) 551414 Ext 2223
during Office Hours.**



February 2009



Information Series

Bonfires



www.braintree.gov.uk

