

Bonfires

Many people consider the traditional method for disposing of garden waste is to have a bonfire - but simply lighting a fire in the garden can be full of pitfalls for the unwary.

You may be breaking the law or endangering somebody's health.

Be a good neighbour

Don't stop others from enjoying their gardens by lighting a bonfire carelessly, try to be considerate and tell your neighbours what you plan to do in advance. A little advance notice could mean that you don't interfere with plans they have. It will allow them time to bring in anything that may get smoky if left outside, like washing, garden furniture or cushions.

Remember that bonfire smoke can be irritating and even harmful to people with chest or heart problems.

Avoid Smoke

If you do light a fire, ensure that only dry material is burnt as this will produce the minimum smoke. Never add household rubbish, aerosols, batteries, foam filled furniture or rubber tyres to the fire, or use sump oil to set it alight. Don't burn animal bedding.

Do not light a fire when weather conditions will cause problems. Smoke hangs in the air on damp windless days and in the evening around sunset. Don't light bonfires when the wind will carry smoke or burning embers over people's property or across roads.

Legislation

There are no official time restrictions for lighting bonfires in East Herts but we do take up complaints if smoke becomes a nuisance.

By lighting a smoky bonfire you could be breaking the law. Anyone lighting a fire and allowing smoke to drift across a road faces a fine of up to £2000 under the Highways (amendment) Act 1986.

Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 it is an offence for smoke to be emitted from premises so as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance- the maximum penalty is £5000. Business premises are liable to a fine of up to £20,000 if they persist after a notice has been served.

How to complain

If someone is causing you a nuisance by lighting a bonfire at an inconvenient time you should first try to talk to them, it is likely that they may not have realised that their activities could be causing a nuisance and disturbing others. If there is a persistent nuisance that you are unable to resolve informally, you can contact Environmental Health on [\(01279\) 655261](tel:01279655261) and explain the problem to them.

Allotment Bonfires

Each year the Council receives a number of complaints regarding allotment bonfires. Most come from people living nearby who are affected by smoke and fumes.

Often the problem is made worse by several allotment holders lighting fires at once and then leaving them to smolder and smoke. Not only is this unpleasant for people living nearby, but you may be risking prosecution and a fine of up to £5000.

As well as nuisance from the smoke, there is always a risk that a fire left unattended can get out of hand. Always douse it thoroughly to ensure that it is out before you leave.

An Alternative to Bonfires

Garden waste can be composted or put in the brown recycling bins.

Garden rubbish can also be disposed of at your local Household Waste Recycling Centres.

[Household Waste & Recycling Centre](#)