



**BASSETLAW**  
DISTRICT COUNCIL  
NORTH NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

## Garden Bonfires

### Remember Your Neighbours!

Do you enjoy your garden? Don't stop your neighbours enjoying theirs by lighting a bonfire carelessly.

Please remember that bonfire smoke can be very irritating and even harmful, particularly to people with chest or heart problems.

The smell and smoke from a bonfire is enough to upset most people, but the bonfire also releases a range of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons into the atmosphere, which in sufficient concentration could constitute a health hazard.

For example, bonfire smoke contains 70 parts per million of the carcinogenic (cancer causing) compound BENZOPYRENE. Cigarette smoke in comparison holds only 0.2 parts per million.

**If you must** have a bonfire, please remember to warn your neighbours. This small courtesy is often all that is needed to avoid feelings of resentment.

**If you do light a bonfire** ensure that the material is dried first. This will reduce the amount of smoke. Never add household rubbish or rubber to the fire. Never use old oil to get it going.

Do not light a fire within an hour of sunset, or leave one alight later than one hour after sunset, when weather conditions often cause smoke to hang in the air.

No fire should be left unattended. Never leave a fire to smoulder, but douse it with soil or water.

Please check no wildlife has inhabited your bonfire prior to lighting!

You should be aware of the basic law about bonfires.

Under the Clean Air Act 1993 a smoky bonfire could be actionable if your Local Authority is satisfied that a nuisance has occurred, and even though it has temporarily ceased, it is likely to recur, the Authority may apply to the Magistrate's Court for a Nuisance Order.

The National Society for Clean Air factsheet *Pollution, Nuisance and the Law* explains the legal position in more detail.

Under the *Highways Act 1980* anyone lighting a fire and allowing smoke to drift across a road faces a fine if it endangers traffic. The police should be contacted in this instance.

## **How to Build a Bonfire**

Your object should be to keep the fire burning quickly with the least possible smoke. To achieve this you need a good updraft and the material you are going to burn must be fairly dry – at least to start with. One way of achieving a good updraft is to support a metal grid on two or three rows of bricks or a series of large stones and build the fire on this.

If you are going to burn large branches, these should be cut up into manageable lengths. Prunings and weeds should be spread out evenly to dry (not stacked in a heap) before they are burned. You can add wetter material once the fire is well underway, it should dry out quickly and not produce too much smoke. When building the bonfire start with a small heap of dry material and cover this with any branches or prunings you have to burn. Continue building the bonfire up in alternate layers of woody and soft plant material. Finish with a layer of heavier woody material to prevent the weeds from being blown away once they catch fire. Don't make the fire too big – about 60cm (2ft) is about right – add more material as the fire burns down. Choose a dry day with only light winds to have a bonfire – and if possible a day when the wind is blowing away from nearby houses. You can use a crumpled newspaper or fire-lighter to start the fire, though if you have built the bonfire properly, you should only need a match. Don't use paraffin as it creates a lot of smoke. Never use petrol or methylated spirits.

## **Conclusions**

If you build a bonfire properly so that there is a good updraft, and keep it small adding more rubbish as it burns down, the fire will be easy to keep under control and should produce the minimum amount of smoke. So long as you choose a day with a gentle breeze to dissipate the smoke and don't coincide your bonfire with washing day, you are unlikely to annoy the neighbours.

Remember that fires can be very dangerous and always site your bonfire well away from anything that could be set alight. Never use petrol or methylated spirits to light the bonfire, don't burn household rubbish or garden chemicals and don't leave fires unattended. If you follow these guidelines, bonfires are a good way of getting rid of garden refuse, that can't be composted. Ignore them and bonfires are antisocial and dangerous.

## **How to Complain**

First speak to the owner of the bonfire. This direct approach may be embarrassing but if you explain the problem they are causing they should be more considerate in future.

If this fails you should seek the advice of the Environmental Health Department of Bassetlaw District Council. Under the 1993 Clean Air Act it is an offence to cause a nuisance through the creation of smoke. The Council may be prepared to take action on behalf, if not, you may apply directly to the local Magistrate's Court for a Nuisance Order.

It would be helpful if you start to keep a record of dates and times of nuisance occurring and its effect on you. The support of witnesses should also help.