

Bonfires and the law

There is no specific law that makes it illegal to have a bonfire or which specifies the times that a bonfire can be lit.

However, a bonfire that leads to complaints about smoke may be classified as a statutory nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The person responsible may be served with a warning notice for persistent problems or if their actions are likely to interfere with other residents' comfort and enjoyment of their properties.

The burning of industrial or commercial waste that cause black smoke is an automatic offence and can lead to prosecution.

Smoke from a fire that reduces visibility on a road can be an offence under the Highways Act, which is a matter dealt with by the Police.



If you have a bonfire...

- **Don't** burn wet waste or green vegetation
- **Don't** burn household waste, rubber tyre or anything containing plastic, foam or paint
- **Don't** have a bonfire when neighbours may be enjoying their gardens or when they may have washing out.
- **Don't** ever leave a fire unattended
- **Don't** have a fire near fences, trees and buildings



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Garden Bonfires



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**Advice on avoiding nuisance
and health issues from bonfires**

The bonfire takes its name from the medieval bon-fire of animal bones. Fires have been used throughout the centuries to mark special occasions and dispose of waste. But in recent times, they have become less acceptable, particularly in built up areas because of the widespread nuisance and health problems that they can cause.

Reasons not to light a bonfire

- **Air pollution**
Burning waste produces smoke – especially if the waste is green or damp. Burning plastic, rubber and painted materials creates noxious fumes and 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, the young and elderly.
- **Annoyance**
Smoke smuts and smells from bonfires result in many complaints to the Council every year. Smoke prevents people from enjoying their gardens and hanging out washing as well as reducing visibility in the area.
- **Safety**
Fire can spread to fences and buildings and burn trees and plants. Exploding bottles and cans are another hazard when waste is burned on a bonfire.



What's the alternative?

There are a range of alternatives that actually make it completely unnecessary ever to have a bonfire.

- **Composting**

Rather than burning garden waste or putting food waste in the grey bin where it will be sent to landfill, you can compost at home using one of NHDC's subsidised home composters to produce useful soil conditioner saving you money on commercial products. Woody waste can be shredded to make it suitable for composting or mulching. You can buy or hire shredders and some allotment societies have their own. Alternatively you can place food and garden waste in your brown bin* with cardboard. Advice on composting can be found on www.recyclenow.com/home_composting

- **Recycling**

Household waste should not be burnt. Many items can be recycled or re-used. NHDC provides recycling services from your doorstep and there are larger Household Waste and Recycling Centres in Letchworth and Royston which can accept a wider range of items for recycling, including electrical equipment, plastics, paper, cardboard, garden waste, cans and glass*. Details of these sites can be found on www.wasteaware.org.uk

Burning old furniture can cause particular hazards as some materials release toxic fumes when burnt. If furniture is in reasonable condition it can be reused by organisations such as Furniture Link, based in Letchworth.

Furniture Link 01462 683800
www.nhcvsfurniturelink.org.uk

There are many free online organisations where you can give your unwanted items to other people such as Freecycle or SnaffleUp.

NHDC also offers a chargeable bulky item collection service* and don't forget you can donate some items to charity shops, or hold your own car boot sale.

*Please visit www.north-herts.gov.uk for the latest information on waste and recycling. More information on all of the above is also available on this website or by calling 01462 474000.