

A Guide to Garden Bonfires

Are bonfires allowed and do they cause any harm?



Bonfires are not illegal, but they can result in legal action if smoke from them causes a nuisance to someone else. You can also be fined if the smoke from your bonfire drifts across a road creating poor visibility. Bonfire smoke causes air pollution, and breathing in the smoke is harmful to health and worsens conditions like asthma, bronchitis, and COPD. Burning household waste, such as furniture or rubbish, is against the law. Recycle your waste, or take bulky items to Sandwell Council's Household Recycling Centre, (the tip) located at Shidas Lane, Oldbury by booking a slot at www.mysandwell.gov.uk.

Should I report a bonfire to the Council?

If bonfire smoke is bothering you try to contact the owner of the bonfire first. A direct approach may feel a bit awkward, but it might be enough to stop someone lighting them again. If bonfires do continue, then a complaint can be made to the Council at www.mysandwell.gov.uk.

When you make a complaint, you will be sent an evidence monitoring form, this is used to record when the fires take place, how long they last and their impact on you. The form may be used as evidence in legal proceedings. A warning letter may also be sent to the address where the bonfires are occurring. This letter explains the rules and the potential legal action that can be taken if outdoor fires cause a statutory nuisance. Please be aware that we cannot take any action against one-off bonfires.



To email the Council you will need to be registered with 'My Sandwell'



The law and bonfires

Sandwell Council investigates bonfire complaints that could be a Statutory Nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. If smoke regularly interferes with someone's enjoyment of their home or garden, an Abatement Notice can be served requiring that there is no recurrence of the Nuisance. Failure to comply with the Abatement Notice is an offence on summary conviction with a maximum fine of £5,000.

If you do light a bonfire follow these guidelines:

- Only burn dry material
- Avoid burning at weekends and bank holidays.
- Never burn household waste, like tyres, cables, plastic, or furniture
- Avoid lighting a fire in unsuitable weather conditions - smoke hangs in the air on damp still days and on windy days smoke can blow into neighbour's gardens, through open windows and across roads
- Avoid burning when air pollution levels in your area are high. Check air pollution levels at www.airquality.co.uk
- Keep your fire away from trees, fences and buildings
- Never use oil, petrol or methylated spirits to light a fire you could damage yourself as well as the environment.
- Don't leave a fire unattended, even when it is just smouldering.
- Warn your neighbours that you are going to have a bonfire, and check those nearby do not have washing hanging outside to dry.