Information Sheet

This information sheet includes information about bonfires, guidelines on minimising smoke nuisance and alternative methods of disposal of waste.

■ The Issue

Bonfires cause local air pollution due to smoke, odour and ash. This can annoy neighbours as they may be unable to use or enjoy their property, for example,
- they may not be able to sit outside on a warm day or ventilate the property due to smoke ingress
- clothes drying on a washing line may need to be rewashed
- ash can soil windows and cars

Smoke can also adversely affect people with existing medical conditions.

■ The Law

Although there are no specific byelaws controlling bonfires, the Council must serve an abatement notice where the smoke constitutes a statutory nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Normally a smoke nuisance is more than a one off event and is such that it affects the health and wellbeing of other people. Failure to comply with an abatement notice can result in a fine of up to £5,000. This is £20,000 in the case of a business.

Smoke allowed to drift across a highway that endangers traffic is an immediate offence under the Highways Act 1980 and is enforced by the Police.

The uncontrolled disposal of trade waste by burning is an offence, irrespective of whether it causes a nuisance or not. The Environment Agency are responsible for enforcing trade waste controls.

■ Guidelines for minimising smoke nuisance

If you really must have a bonfire, the following guidance may help to avoid causing nuisance to your neighbours:

(a) Only burn dry materials that burn very quickly resulting in the minimum of smoke.
(b) Never burn commercial or household waste, tyres or anything containing plastic.
(c) Check the wind so that the smoke is blown away from the houses.
(d) Avoid lighting bonfires in damp, still, conditions and in the evenings as the smoke will linger longer at low levels.
(e) Site the bonfire away from houses.
(f) Never leave a bonfire unattended nor leave it to smoulder for hours on end as this can be most annoying.
Alternatives to burning

There are alternatives to burning. There are two local civic amenity sites run by the Surrey County Council where waste can be deposited. In addition the Reigate & Banstead Borough Council operate a green waste collection scheme and have initiatives to encourage home composting. More details on these appear below.

Civic Amenity Sites

Garden and other forms of domestic waste can be disposed of free of charge at the following civic amenity sites:

Blenheim Road Horley Road
Longmead Industrial Estate Earlswood
Epsom KT19 9AP Tel: 01372 728722 Redhill RH1 6PN Tel: 01737 767901

The opening times for the sites are:

Winter (1 October - 31 March) Summer (1 April - 30 September)
Monday to Friday: 08.00 - 16.15 Monday - Friday: 08.00 - 17.15
Weekends: 09.00 - 16.15 Weekends: 09.00 - 16.45

Garden Waste Collection Service

The Council runs a fortnightly garden waste collection scheme. Membership to the scheme is by subscription for either a wheeled bin or a reusable garden waste sack dependent on your needs.

Home Composting

Composting is an inexpensive natural process that transforms kitchen and garden waste into nutrient rich food for your garden. Green waste from the kitchen and garden can be composted as well as cardboard, shredded paper and crushed eggs. Home composters are widely available and strong wire mesh with holes smaller than 10 pence piece should be used across the base to prevent animals nesting in them.