

A Guide to Good Practice

Every year the council receives a large number of complaints about nuisance caused by bonfires. The smoke can be particularly distressing to vulnerable groups, including young children and asthmatics. Such nuisance is completely unnecessary given that there are many alternatives to bonfires. This leaflet explains the law and gives some suggestions.

Smog and Smoke Control

As a result of the thousands of deaths attributed to the air pollution smogs of the early 1950s, the Clean Air Act 1956 was passed. This enabled all of Harrow to become a "smoke control area". This means that all fuel used in your home must be an authorised fuel such as gas, electricity, oil or coke-type fuel. It is illegal to emit smoke from your chimney by burning wood, ordinary coal, etc.

Bonfires

However, this piece of law does **not** apply to outdoor bonfires. These are covered by Section 80 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. If a bonfire causes a nuisance to neighbours then the Council can serve a notice requiring it to be put out and preventing bonfires in the future. Failure to comply with a notice is an offence carrying a maximum fine of £5000.

We strongly recommend that people do not light bonfires at all. Whilst a small fire of woody garden waste is not prohibited by law, it is very likely to cause a nuisance if you have near neighbours, and you may well have to put it out. Charred, soggy, part-burned bonfire contents are then much more messy to dispose of than the unburned version.



Before lighting a bonfire, please consider some cleaner, safer alternatives

Home composting

Composting (or burying) soft garden waste such as grass cuttings and leaves is the best means of disposal as it returns humus and nutrients to the soil. Harrow Council has a Home Composting Initiative to make composters available within the Borough at an economical price. Telephone 020 8901 2600 for further information. Some trial areas of the borough have been provided with brown bins for collection and composting of organic waste.

Your brown wheelie bin

Woody garden waste such as rose prunings cannot be easily composted at home. These can be disposed of by cutting them relatively short and putting them into your brown wheelie bin, along with other garden waste and organic matter. You should never put soil, bricks or similar in the brown bin. Use your green wheelie bin for other domestic waste. For further information about what else you can put in your wheelie bins, contact us on 020 8901 2600 or email waste@harrow.gov.uk

The Civic Amenity Sites

If you have a lot of green waste then you can pack the waste into bags or boxes and take them to the Civic Amenity Site for free disposal.

Harrow's Civic Amenity Site is in Forward Drive (near the Leisure Centre). It is open between 8.30am and 4.30pm 7 days a week (Telephone 020 8424 1091). This site is free to householders but a charge is made for trade waste.

Special Collections

If you do not have your own transport you could telephone the Cleansing Services on 020 8901 2600 to arrange a Special Collection. Ask for an estimate when you phone.

Skips

Where very large amounts of waste from the garden or house clearance are to be disposed of it might be worth hiring a skip from a private contractor. Prices can vary so do ask for a quote first. If you need to place the skip on the road or pavement rather than in your garden, then the contractor needs to obtain a licence from the Council first. It is **your** responsibility to ensure the skip is properly positioned and lit at night so as to prevent accidents.

Please note that Harrow has no bye-laws about times when bonfires are allowed. Fires must not cause nuisance at any time of the day or night. The usual ways that fires cause a nuisance are through smell, smoke and fly ash. If you do any of the following, you are even more likely to cause a problem, and we caution you against them.

- Lighting a fire while the weather is fine and your neighbours have laundry drying, or are out enjoying their gardens or have windows wide open is unnecessary, unpleasant and antisocial. It is easy to spoil a nice day for everyone with clouds of smoke, smell, stinging eyes and noses, and laundry that needs to be re-washed to remove the smuts and the smell.
- Burning wet material or freshly cut greenery generates more smoke than a normal bonfire.
- Burning painted or treated wood, oily rags, rubber, plastics or similar generates toxic fumes and dark smoke, which is a separate offence.
- Lighting a fire when the weather is cool and damp causes the smoke to be held down low where it causes more nuisance.
- Lighting large fires, burning for long periods or repeatedly lighting fires.
- Lighting a fire in a dangerous place where it could spread or burn out of control.
- Having no means to extinguish a fire if needed.
- Burning cable to recover the metal core is a specific offence under the Clean Air Act 1993.
- Allowing smoke to drift across the highway where it causes (or might cause) an accident is an offence under the Highways Acts (as amended). You could also be sued for damages by people who suffer loss or harm due to your actions, e.g. someone who is hurt in a car accident due to the smoke that you have produced.

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