

Chimney smoke

Smoke from chimneys on residential premises can be a nuisance to neighbours and interfere with normal daily activities. If severe enough, it can be detrimental to people's health.

If you own a wood heater, it is your responsibility to ensure your appliance operates correctly and you only burn dry, seasoned firewood. An excessively smoking wood heater causes air pollution and contains fine particles that can affect people's lungs. These fine particles can be particularly dangerous to the very young, the elderly and people who have existing respiratory problems.

This fact sheet includes information that can help residents to reduce smoke and meet legal requirements.

Be a good neighbour

Take the time to talk to neighbours and find out their concerns. In many cases an agreement can be reached that satisfies everyone's needs. If you own a wood heater, make a habit of checking the chimney for excessive smoke.

The law

Under Council's *Local Law No. 10 (Public Health) 1999*, the release of chimney smoke on residential premises may constitute a nuisance if it causes or is likely to cause harm to human health or safety, personal injury or property damage.

Council will investigate if issues between neighbours cannot be resolved and further complaints are made.

If the smoke is determined to be a nuisance, Council may issue the person causing the smoke with a compliance notice, detailing the nuisance and giving a timeframe for problems to be rectified. Fines for non-compliance may be issued.

The criteria

When investigating a smoke complaint, Council will consider:

- the amount of smoke being emitted
- the duration and rate of emission and the smoke's characteristics and qualities
- the sensitivity of the environment into which the smoke is being emitted and the impact that it has had or may have
- views of any other neighbours or complainants
- other relevant criteria.

Reducing smoke emissions

Choose your firewood carefully

The dryness of firewood makes all the difference to the amount of smoke emitted from a chimney. Wet or green wood causes excessive smoke and doesn't generate as much heat. Dry wood is generally lighter in colour and should make a hollow cracking sound when banged together. Wet or green wood is heavier and usually darker in colour. Do not use wood products such as chipboard, as they contain formaldehyde, or treated or painted timber, as the smoke from these products is hazardous to the health of others.



Stack wood under cover in a dry ventilated area

Wood should be air-dried for at least eight months before burning. Keep wood under cover and stack in a criss-cross manner to allow air to circulate.

Burn the fire brightly

Start with dry kindling and fully open the air controls. Do not use oil or fuel soaked rags. Once the fire is well established, gradually add larger wood pieces, making sure not to choke the fire by overloading it with logs. An efficient fire should have bright swirling flames and red glowing embers with little or no smoke coming from the chimney.

Keep air controls open at night

Avoid shutting down the air controls (damper) overnight as this also causes excessive smoke. Let the fire burn out completely overnight – an insulated house should hold enough heat to keep your house warm until morning.

Check your chimney

All wood heaters tend to smoke when first lit. However, the smoke should not last for more than 15 minutes. Regularly check the chimney, and if it is smoking too much, reduce the fuel load and open the airflows.

Clean and maintain your chimney

Clean and maintain your chimney and wood heater regularly, especially at the beginning and end of winter. Regularly check the glass door for cracks and door ropes and seals for deterioration. Check the firebox for rust and lubricate the air-slide control with high temperature grease.



Other things to consider

Before you buy a wood heater

Smoke from a wood heater is a difficult problem to resolve because most of them (regardless of their type and technology) will tend to emit smoke at different times. Fires and wood heaters in residential areas which are in close proximity to other homes are more likely to cause nuisance on a still winter's night compared with those in rural areas which are often a considerable distance from other dwellings, resulting in the possible "dilution" of smoke.

Consider the potential impacts that a wood heater may have on your neighbours. If you decide to purchase a wood heater, ensure that it is the correct size. A heater too large for a home will need to be turned down, reducing its efficiency and causing excessive smoke. Make sure that the heater is constructed and installed correctly and meets the Australian Standards (AS4013 and AS2918).

Insulation

By having a properly insulated house, the need for heating will be reduced. Ensure that ceiling insulation is in place, draughts are blocked, doors are closed to unoccupied rooms and curtains are drawn to keep heat in.

Alternative heating methods

Consider other heating alternatives such as gas heaters, which are clean burning, cost effective and less polluting.

For more information

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