

# Backyard Burning

# – Minimising Smoke

## Legal responsibilities

Under the *Environmental Protection Act 1994,* it is an offence to cause a smoke nuisance to neighbours from backyard fires, including braziers and fire pits. If a smoke nuisance or impact is caused to neighbours, Council may direct that the fire be put out or otherwise managed to prevent the smoke nuisance or impact.

The following advice is provided to reduce the risk of causing smoke nuisance or impacts to neighbours:

### Use the correct wood

Never burn treated or painted timber, plastics, rubbish, rubber, paints, fabrics, petrol, oils, solvents, rags or driftwood as they will release toxic chemicals that are dangerous to your family and neighbours.

* Only ever burn dry and well-seasoned wood. The dryness of firewood makes a significant difference to the amount of smoke emitted from a fire. Damp or green wood that has been freshly cut off the tree causes excessive smoke and doesn’t generate as much heat. Wood needs to be dried for upwards of 8 months.
* Commercially bought firewood may not be properly seasoned and may need further drying out at home. You can usually tell seasoned wood by looking at the ends of cut sections. Dried wood will have large cracks running across the grain. When you hit two pieces of dry wood together, there should be a loud, hollow cracking sound. A dull, muffled sound indicates that the wood is damp.
* Buy split timber, preferably without bark. Split timber has a greater surface area that allows the wood to dry out and become seasoned more quickly. Split wood should not be thicker than 15 centimetres.
* Softwoods are easier to ignite, burn faster and produce less coal. They are best used for starting the fire.
* Hardwoods are harder to ignite, burn at slower rates and produce better coals. As hardwood takes a longer time to ignite, it can lead to higher smoke emissions on lighting or refuelling. Use hardwoods after achieving a good, hot fire with kindling and smaller wood pieces.
* Avoid burning camphor wood or other highly scented woods that could cause an odour nuisance.
* Burn only 100% untreated wood. Burning of CCA-treated wood releases arsenic into the air, your home and into the ash, which if inhaled, is dangerous. Any wood product with a coating such as melamine or formica, painted, stained or varnished wood, MDF, custom wood, chipboard or plywood which has glue and bindings, are also dangerous to burn.

### Store your wood correctly

To avoid smoke, be sure to keep your firewood dry.

* Buy your wood well in advance, remove the packaging and store it correctly to ensure it dries out.
* Split the wood into pieces of about 15cm in width before stacking in a heap.
* Wood is best stored in an undercover area on pallets or raised on blocks, not on the ground or the wood will absorb moisture and increase the amount of smoke when burnt.
* Stacking the wood loosely, or in a crisscrossed manner, will allow air to circulate through the wood heap. A narrow heap, less than 50cm, will also assist in air movement.
* Do not cover the wood heap with a tarp as this will trap moisture and prevent air circulation.
* You may wish to purchase a moisture meter to be confident of the dryness of your wood.

### Lighting and maintaining the fire

Smoke comes from a fire that is not burning hot enough. First of all, check if your brazier or firepit will allow enough air to the fire. There should be holes around the sides and bottom of the container to draw air through the fire and help avoid smoke.

* Build the fire using small kindling wood, loosely crumpled paper and/or firelighters.
* Create a pyramid of kindling in a way that allows air to circulate around the fire. You can expect some smoke when you first start, but it should not last longer than 20 minutes.

Never use petrol, oil or kerosene to help light the fire. This could cause an explosion.

* Once the fire has started, gradually increase the size of the wood you add, until the fire is fully established. Start with soft woods and progress to hardwood when the fire is well established.
* Once a hot bed of coals has formed you can add larger pieces of dry, clean, seasoned wood.
* Do not smother the fire by adding logs that are too large, no more than about two to four kilograms.
* A good fire will be hot and aerated with coals and flames glowing brightly. Dark, smouldering wood and a lot of smoke are signs of poor and incomplete burning and insufficient air flow.
* Always put the fire out with water. Do not cover with sand or dirt or let the fire burn overnight.

### Check and monitor the amount and direction of smoke

You are responsible for ensuring that the smoke does not affect others in the community. Monitor the amount of smoke coming from your fire to ensure it is not causing a smoke nuisance.

* From time to time stand back and check if there is smoke from your fire and where your smoke is going.
* Wind, fog, trees and buildings will all affect where the smoke goes.
* Sometimes on winter evenings atmospheric conditions will trap smoke low to the ground over the whole neighbourhood.
* If you can see that this is happening, or if your smoke is going towards your neighbours’ houses, please be courteous and put the fire out.
* Never leave your fire unattended. Actively supervise children around fires.

If anyone is burned, fun the affected area under cool running water and call 000.

For more information, please visit Council’s website ([www.brisbane.qld.gov.au](http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au)) and search the term ‘backyard burning’. Alternatively, you can contact Council’s 24-7 Customer Contact Centre on   
3403 8888.