

Maintaining solid fuel appliances

The maintenance of solid fuel appliances is very important to ensure safe and efficient operation.

The following general guidelines are recommended but it is important to follow any instructions from your appliance manufacturer.

- a) Ensure that your chimney is swept from top to bottom at least once a year. If you are responsible for this work then you may find that a member of the National Association of Chimney Sweeps (NACS) will provide a professional service - contact details below.
- b) Air is vital; make sure you have enough ventilation to keep your fire burning properly.
- c) Flueways at the back of any boiler should be cleaned at least once a month.
- d) Throat plates at the top of any room heater should be removed and cleaned regularly.
- e) Check and empty the ashcan regularly and at least once every day. Do not let the ashcan overflow with ash.

You should take immediate action if you smell or suspect fumes – open windows and doors immediately and let the fire go out. Do not relight the fire until you have had your chimney and appliance flueways checked by a qualified engineer.

Carbon Monoxide (CO)

It is a colourless, odourless, poisonous gas produced by the incomplete combustion of carbon-based fuels. Fit a carbon monoxide alarm that meets

European Standard EN 50291 and carries a British or European mark, such as a kite mark. You can be particularly at risk from CO poisoning when you are asleep, because you may not be aware of early symptoms until it is too late. Having an audible CO alarm could wake you and save your life.

What could happen if a smoke from a domestic chimney causes a nuisance?

Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Council is obliged to take action where a statutory nuisance exists. This includes smoke, fumes or gases “emitted from premises so as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance”, and can include nuisance created by smoke from domestic chimneys. To be considered a possible nuisance, the smoke has to be a regularly occurring problem and interfering substantially with your well-being, comfort or enjoyment of your property (this includes inside your house or in your garden).

One-off events would not usually be a statutory nuisance but if events are repeated regularly over a period of time, then it could be a statutory nuisance. If the smoke from a domestic chimney causes a nuisance to other people the Council can serve a notice to abate the nuisance or prevent it happening again. If the person responsible does not comply with this notice then they can be fined up to £5,000.

Environmental Services

Clean Air Act, Smoke Control Areas & Chimney Smoke

Clean Air Act 1993

Under the Clean Air Act 1993, it is an offence to emit smoke from a chimney by burning wood or ordinary coal within a Smoke Control Area.



What is a smoke control area?

Under the Clean Air Act 1993 local authorities may declare the whole or part of the district of the authority to be a smoke control area.

The council has declared the whole of Tameside is a Smoke Control Area and you can only use authorised 'smokeless' fuel in these areas.

What is an authorised (smokeless) fuel?

Authorised fuels are fuels which are authorised by Statutory Instruments (Regulations) made under the Clean Air Act 1993 or Clean Air (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. These include inherently smokeless

fuels such as gas, electricity and anthracite together with specified brands of manufactured solid smokeless fuels. These fuels have passed tests to confirm that they are capable of burning in an open fireplace without producing smoke.

Offences in “Smoke Control Areas”

It is an offence to emit smoke from a chimney of a building, from a furnace or from any fixed boiler if located in a designated smoke control area. It is also an offence to acquire an “unauthorised fuel” for use within a smoke control area unless it is used in an “exempt” appliance (“exempted” from the controls which generally apply in the smoke control area). The current maximum level of fine is £1,000 for each offence.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has powers under the Act to authorise smokeless fuels or exempt appliances for use in smoke control areas in England.

What are exempt appliances?

Exempt appliances are appliances (ovens, wood burners and stoves) which have been exempted by Statutory Instruments (Orders) under the Clean Air Act 1993 or Clean Air (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. These have passed tests to confirm that they are

capable of burning an unauthorised or inherently smoky solid fuel without emitting smoke.

Choosing a solid fuel appliance

There are three main categories of solid fuel appliance:

- f) Open fireplaces are the simplest (but least efficient) way to burn solid fuels
- g) Stoves and room heaters provide heat for a single room. They burn fuel much more efficiently than an open fire
- h) Boilers are the most sophisticated way of burning solid fuel. They can provide heating and hot water for a whole house

Solid fuel appliances must be correctly installed to ensure they are safe to use. The industry body for solid fuel appliance installers is HETAS, who provide a list of accredited installers on their website. You should also ensure that your chimney is inspected before you start using solid fuels, as a poorly maintained chimney may lead to dangerous fumes building up in your home.

Some homes may need a new chimney or flue in order to install a solid fuel appliance. If you live in a conservation area this may require planning permission; please contact the council if you are in doubt.