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FIRE GUIDANCE — GARDEN FIRES

Fires pose significant risks to communal areas and gardens, encompassing both property damage and threats to human safety. Tenants of social housing must be aware of the significant risks that fires pose to communal areas and gardens. Fires in shared spaces can spread rapidly, threatening the safety of residents and causing extensive property damage.

In addition to property loss, fires in gardens can harm local ecosystems, release toxic smoke, and disrupt the tranquility of the surrounding community. Understanding and addressing these risks is crucial for safeguarding communal areas and gardens against the devastating consequences of fires.

Whilst there are no laws which prohibit garden bonfires, or when they can be lit, there are laws around the nuisance they may cause and the burning of certain materials.

It can be an offence to burn household waste which creates dark smoke, this includes rubber, painted/treated wood, furniture, tyres and plastic.

Under the Environmental Protection Act, it is an offence for people to dispose of their domestic waste in a way likely to cause pollution of the environment or harm to human health. In practice, you should not burn waste that is likely to create excessive smoke or noxious fumes. If only dry garden waste is burnt, your bonfire should not cause a problem but this is dependent on your location.

The local authority provides a service for collecting garden waste, however, there are some important considerations should you still decide to have a garden bonfire.

You should risk assess all aspects of any fire, taking into account location, materials to be disposed of, proximity to buildings, roads, trees, fences, etc.

Air Pollution

Burning garden waste produces smoke—especially if that waste is green or damp. This will emit harmful pollutants including particles and dioxins. Burning plastic, rubber or painted materials creates noxious fumes that give off a range of poisonous compounds.

Health Effects

Air pollution can have damaging health effects and people with existing health problems are especially vulnerable, e.g., asthmatics, people with heart conditions, children and the elderly.

Nuisance Complaints

Smoke and smell from burning materials is the source of a significant number of complaints every year. Smoke prevents neighbours from enjoying their gardens, opening windows or hanging washing out and reduces visibility in the neighbourhood on roads.

Safety

Fire can spread to fences or buildings and scorch trees and plants. Exploding bottles and cans are a hazard when rubbish is burned. Piles of garden waste are often used as a refuge by animals, so look out for hibernating wildlife and sleeping pets.

Can you consider an alternative to burning garden waste?

Composting

Rather than burning garden waste or putting food waste in the dustbin where it will end up buried or incinerated, a compost bin will produce useful soil conditioner which in turn can help save money.

Recycling

Household waste should certainly not be burnt. Many items can be reused or recycled. Burning old furniture can cause particular hazards as some materials can release toxic fumes when burnt. If furniture is in reasonable condition there are many charitable organisations who will collect these items. The local authority also offer a bulky waste collection service for old furniture. Your unwanted goods may also be of value to other people and can be donated to charity shops.

Bonfire Guidance

Bonfires can be enjoyable, providing warmth and a focal point for gatherings, but they also come with inherent risks.

- Never leave a fire unattended or leave it to smoulder—put it out.
- Only burn dry material.
- Never burn household rubbish, rubber tyres, or anything containing plastic, foam or paint.
- Avoid lighting a fire in unsuitable weather conditions—smoke hangs in the air on damp, still days. If it is too windy, smoke blows into neighbours gardens and windows and across roads.
- Avoid burning when air pollution levels in your area are high or very high.
- Keep your fire away from trees, fences and buildings.
- Never use oil, petrol to light a fire—you could harm yourself and damage the environment.

Safe Use of BBQs

Barbecues can be dangerous if not handled responsibly, they can remain hot for hours and also give off carbon monoxide fumes for several hours after they go out, so you should never bring them indoors.

- Never use a BBQ including disposables indoors or on a balcony.
- Use the 30 feet rule and ensure that BBQs are placed away from any flammable surface, trees or buildings.
- Don't use petrol or any flammable liquid on your BBQ. Firelighters are a safer option.
- Supervise children and pets around a BBQ both when it's lit and during the cool down.
- Ensure the BBQ is fully out, prior to going indoors or leaving your garden.

Chiminea Guidance

As we embrace the nice weather, we see more and more people enjoying their outdoor space and chiminea's have become more popular over the years. Generally they can be enjoyed more safely than open fire pits and bonfires, however, there is best practice everyone can adhere to in order to avoid fires occurring.

- Chiminea should be erected as per the manufacturer's guidelines, however, this is usually recommended to be set up on bricks or pavers. This helps provide a stable surface and a non-flammable surface.
- Never place a chiminea on decking or other flammable surface.
- Combustible fluids or chemicals should never be used.
- Prior to using a chiminea, think carefully about the location. Best practice guidance is 30 feet from any trees, buildings or flammable material.
- Ensure that your chiminea is safely out before you go inside or you leave your property. In hot dry conditions, fires may appear to be out but may still ignite.

Would you like to talk?

For more information, please reach out to a Gallagher representative.

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Registered Office: Spectrum Building, 7th Floor, 55 Blythswood Street, Glasgow, G2 7AT.
Registered in Scotland. Company Number: SC108909. FP899-2023 Exp. 03.07.2024.

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