A guide on how to
Burn better.
Breathe better.
Why is it important to improve the way we burn in the home?

Air pollution is the biggest environmental risk to public health and we need to take action to reduce the most damaging air pollutants.

Burning at home is the single biggest contributor to a type of pollutant called fine particulate matter, which is present in smoke. These tiny particles can damage your lungs and other organs, and harm the health of you and your family.

If you have open fires or stoves, this guide outlines some easy steps you can take to improve the way you burn.

What are the benefit of changing how you burn?
• Get the most out of your open fire or stove so that it performs better, helping you use less fuel to produce more heat.
• Keep yourself and your family safe by reducing the risk of chimney fires.
• Help improve the air we all breathe by reducing the amount of pollution produced when you burn.
How do you know which fuels to burn?

It can be difficult to know which fuels to choose to reduce pollution.

We’ve provided some information to identify which fuels to use and additional steps you can take to help you burn more efficiently.

You should start by checking with your local council to see if you are living in a smoke control area. There are regulations that apply to burning in these areas and you could be committing an offence if smoke is released from the chimney of your home:
See [gov.uk/smoke-control-area-rules](https://www.gov.uk/smoke-control-area-rules) for details.

You should always check which fuel types are recommended for your appliance. Using the wrong fuel could damage your appliance, affect your chimney as well as invalidating your warranty.
Wood
It is best practice when burning wood at home to make sure it is dried properly. Freshly cut wood takes a minimum of 12 months of air drying before it’s considered dry enough for burning. Burning wet wood produces lots of smoke and creates tar deposits which can damage your appliance and chimney, increasing maintenance costs and the risk of chimney fires.

Look for sustainably sourced and dried (seasoned) wood. Make sure that you store it in a way that keeps it dry. You’ll get less smoke and better heat efficiency. This also means your appliance and chimney will require less maintenance, saving you money in the long run.

• Look for the ‘Ready to Burn’ logo on packaging.
• Ask your supplier for advice on how to properly store and season wood at home, especially if you’re buying loose logs to dry yourself.
• If you’re producing your own logs for burning, store them in a dry area, allowing them to air dry for at least 12 months before burning.
• Use a moisture meter to measure the water content of the wood. Moisture levels should be 20% or less before burning.

Whilst a moisture meter is the best way to check if your wood is ready to burn, there are some visual signs you can look out for:

• **Weight** – when comparing similar-sized logs and the same species, if the log is heavier this can indicate it is still wet.
• **Sound** – a hollow sound when tapping indicates dry logs.
• **Cracked ends** – can indicate dry logs.
• **Bark** – the looser the bark the drier the log.
• **Colour** – dry wood can be lighter in colour.

See the Forestry Commission for more information on **choosing and drying** logs.

You should always avoid burning treated wood, such as painted, stained or chemically treated wood, e.g. old furniture, pallets and MDF. These release dangerous pollutants which could seriously harm you and your family.
**Manufactured solid fuels**  
Manufactured solid fuels are available in a range of forms, such as fire logs and briquettes. Some manufactured solid fuels produce less smoke than others. These can be easily identified, as the packaging will say ‘suitable for use in smoke control areas’.

Before purchasing manufactured solid fuels, check your appliance manual to make sure which specific fuels can be used. Incorrect use can cause damage to your appliance.

You can find a list of fuels that are approved for burning in smoke control areas and can be used more widely.

**Coal**  
The World Health Organization classifies coal smoke as a human carcinogen. If you currently burn coal, you should consider switching to a smokeless coal which will help make your home a cleaner and healthier place to live in. Alternatively, you could consider using a manufactured solid fuel if your appliance is suitable.
How do you maintain your open fire or stove?

Regularly maintaining your open fire or stove means it will perform better, using less fuel to produce more heat.

Always use your open fire or stove in line with the manufacturer and installer’s guidance and only burn suitable fuels.

If you’re having a fire or stove installed, make sure this is done by a registered/certified installer. If you’re unsure whether your current system was installed correctly, you may want to consider having it serviced. If it has been installed incorrectly it can lead to carbon monoxide being released into your home, which can be dangerous to you and your family. You should also install a carbon monoxide monitor in your home.

Getting your stove serviced
It is recommended that you get your stove serviced once a year by an approved maintenance engineer. You can find someone by checking with the Stove Industry Alliance, HETAS or your local stove supplier.

If you’re thinking of buying a new stove, then consider purchasing one that has a Defra exemption, or an Eco-design Ready stove. These have been rigorously tested and demonstrate low smoke emissions. Newer stoves are also likely to be more efficient in terms of heat output.

Chimney sweeping
When you use an open fire or stove, soot and tar build up in your chimney over time, reducing its efficiency and increasing the risk of chimney fires. It is recommended you get your chimney swept at least once a year.

It’s best practice to use a reputable chimney sweep who will be able to provide you with advice on good burning practices.
Further information

Watch a video on good burning practices: burnright.co.uk

Find a local wood suppliers: readytoburn.org

Find out more about Ecodesign Ready stoves: stoveindustryalliance.com/ecodesign-ready-stoves-and-air-quality/