

Smoke from Chimneys

Smoke from chimneys can cause a nuisance to neighbours and interfere with their normal daily activities. If severe enough, it can not only cause inconvenience, but also 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 containing fine particles (PM₁₀), which can affect people's lungs. These fine particles can be particularly dangerous to people who have existing respiratory problems, the very young and the elderly

Be a Good Neighbor

Take the time to talk to neighbours. If you own a wood heater, make a habit of checking the chimney when first lit and during operation for excessive smoke. Find out what concerns neighbours may have and ask for suggestions about solving any problems. In many cases an agreement can be reached that satisfies everyone's needs.

The Law

The *Environmental Protection Act 1994* introduced by the State Government includes controls for smoke emissions. Council is legally required to enforce these controls when smoke problems occur from residential premises. If issues between neighbours cannot be resolved and further complaints are made, Council will have to investigate. If the smoke is determined to be a nuisance, Council may issue the residence causing the smoke problem with a 'Direction Notice'. A Direction Notice will detail what offence has taken place and the time frame that the offender has, to rectify the problem. If the direction notice is not complied with, Council may then issue an on-the-spot fine.

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, and
- the views of any other neighbors or complainants.

Reducing smoke emissions

- Choosing the 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 people's health.

- Stack wood under cover in a dry ventilated area
Wood should be air-dried for at least eight months before it is ready to burn. Keep wood under cover and stack in a crisscross 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. The less smoke, the hotter and more efficient the fire.
- Keep air controls open at night
Do not shut down the air controls overnight as this also causes excessive smoke. Let the fire burn out completely overnight – an insulated house will 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 when first lit or refueling. Regularly check the chimney. If it is smoking too much, reduce the fuel load and open the airflows.
- Clean and maintain your chimney regularly
At the beginning and end of winter each year, clean and inspect the chimney, fireplace and/or firebox. If you have a combustion heater, regularly check glass door for cracks, and door ropes and seals for deterioration. Check the firebox for rust and make sure that the firebricks are not damaged. Every second year the air slide control should be lubricated with high temperature grease.

For further information please contact:

Environmental Health Services at Mount Isa City Council on 4747 3200