

BARBECUE SAFETY ADVICE

Outdoor activities are often a great way to spend your leisure time but they have their own set of unique fire risks that should not be underestimated. However, some common sense preparation can ensure you have a safe and enjoyable experience.

Barbecues

A barbecue should be a safe and enjoyable experience but it's all too easy to be distracted when you have friends and family around you whilst cooking. To avoid injuries or damage to property, follow these simple precautions:

General Safety

- Make sure your barbecue is in good working order
- Ensure the barbecue is on a flat site, well away from a shed, trees or shrubs
- Keep children, garden games and pets well away from the cooking area
- Never leave the barbecue unattended
- Keep a bucket of water or sand nearby for emergencies
- Ensure the barbecue is cool before attempting to move it.

Charcoal Barbecues

- Use only enough charcoal to cover the base to a depth of about 50mm (2 inches)
- Only use recognised fire lighters or starter fuel and only on cold coals – use the minimum necessary and never use petrol
- Never put hot ashes straight into a dustbin or wheelie bin – they could melt the plastic and cause a fire.

Gas Barbecues

- Make sure the tap is turned off before changing the gas cylinder
- Change cylinders outdoors if possible or in a well-ventilated area
- If you suspect a leak to the cylinder or pipe work, brush soapy water around the joints and watch for bubbles – tighten to fix but do not over tighten
- After cooking, turn off the gas cylinder before turning off at the controls to ensure any residual gas in the pipe work is used up.

Caravanning

Caravans are smaller and more confined than a house so the fire risks can be potentially more hazardous. It is essential that you install a smoke alarm to give early warning of a fire and follow these precautions to reduce your risks:

- On a caravan site, find out what the firefighting arrangements are
- Never leave children alone in a caravan – they are particularly vulnerable
- A fully charged water or dry powder fire extinguisher should be located in the caravan near an exit door and a fire blanket should be adjacent to the cooking area
- Keep a torch handy for emergencies – never use candles
- Make sure everyone knows how to operate escape windows and doors
- Keep gas cylinders outside the caravan unless a special ventilated compartment is provided.

Fire Safety in the Countryside

Fire has the potential to cause destruction of the countryside, open spaces and wildlife habitat. Following these few simple precautions and showing a little extra care, this could be prevented:

- Dispose of smoking materials properly and make sure they are completely extinguished
- Don't leave camp fires or barbecues unattended and extinguish them properly after use
- Clear away bottles, glasses and any broken glass to prevent them magnifying the sun's rays and starting a fire
- Explain to children the dangers of playing with lighted fires.

If fire breaks out, call the fire and rescue service immediately on 999. When specifying your location, mention any landmarks and if phoning from a phone box, stay nearby so you can direct the fire appliances to the scene.

Don't attempt to fight the fire yourself unless it is very small – grass and crop fires can travel very quickly.

Camping

To prevent people being injured from fire whilst camping, follow these fire safety precautions:

- Allow at least 6 metres (18 feet) spacing between tents
- Never use candles in or near a tent – always use a torch
- Discourage smoking – especially in smaller tents
- Do not use cooking equipment in smaller tents
- Ensure everyone knows the location of the nearest telephone and if applicable nearest fire point in case of emergency.

Cooking

- Keep cookers away from the tent entrance
- Make certain the cooker is stable, away from draughts and in an area where they will not get knocked over
- Keep flammables (including long grass) away from the cooking area
- Avoid using liquid fuel appliances if at all possible
- Only change disposable gas cylinders when they are completely empty.

Building an open fire

- Never build a fire where the soil is of peat
- Build it well away from any tents – especially in windy weather (at least 10 metres)
- Clear the area of grass, leaves and brush away to form a circle of earth around the fire
- A fire stack should be made so that it will collapse inwards when burning
- Do not leave the fire unattended and watch for flying embers or sparks
- Make sure you extinguish the fire before going to bed or when you leave.