

Solid Fuel Fires -Safety Advice for Users

Solid Fuel Appliances and Fires

All the appliances in your home operate more safely, efficiently and reliably if they are installed and serviced correctly.

Solid fuel appliances are no exception to this and following the simple guidelines contained within this guidance will ensure their safe and efficient operation.

There are Three Golden Rules of Safety for using Solid Fuel appliances

- Ensure they have proper ventilation.
- Regular safety inspections, cleaning and sweeping the chimney.
- Use the correct fuel as recommended by the manufacturer and labelled "Ready to Burn".

Proper Ventilation

Heating appliances, whatever fuel they burn, need fresh air in order to function efficiently and safely. Efficient combustion relies on a constant and enough flow of air, which cannot be provided if the room is completely airtight. If your home has draught-proofing or double-glazing fitted, you will have an air vent in an exterior wall of the room. DO NOT interfere with, block or cover the vent, this is there for your safety.

Regular safety inspections, cleaning and sweeping the chimney

Bernicia will sweep your chimney and carry out a safety inspection every six months. It is vital that you allow us access to your home to do this and allow us to make sure that everything operates safely and efficiently. This will ensure the safety of you, your family and all visitors to your home.

It is essential that you do not allow soot or ash to build up where it can hinder or prevent the free flow of smoke and other products of combustion. You must do the following:

- Daily – empty and check the ash tray every day.
- Weekly – flue ways/throat plates at the back of the fire must be cleaned once a week, but always let the fire go out and allow ashes to cool before cleaning.
- Monthly - the throat plate which is situated at the top of the fire should be removed or lowered down to remove any build-up of fly ash or chimney debris. This should be carried out when the appliance is cold.
- If you are not sure how to clean the appliance correctly, ask and we will show you. In any event you will be shown how to do this at the six-monthly service. Where required the service engineer will also leave you a copy of the manufacturer's instructions for operating, maintaining and cleaning your solid fuel appliance and a copy of the Bernicia 'Important Solid Fuel Safety Information' leaflet that gives essential advice for using your solid fuel appliance safely and efficiently.

Use the Correct Fuel

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To get the best out of the appliance and to reap the maximum benefits in terms of fuel efficiency, it is important to use the fuel that is recommended for your appliance and that this fuel meets the new 'Ready to Burn' legislation.

The 'Ready to Burn' legislation came into force on 1 May 2021. The new law bans the sale of the most polluting fuels used in homes, including wet wood and house coal. Wood sold in volumes up to 2m³ will need to be 'Ready to Burn' certified as having moisture content of less than 20%. Always check that the fuel has a 'Ready to Burn' Certification Mark on the packaging (see below). It is recommended that all 'Ready to Burn' wood should be stored inside.



The use of incorrect fuels can damage the appliance and flue and can lead to a dangerous and potentially poisonous build-up of deposits which will block the chimney or flue and cause toxic carbon monoxide (CO) fumes to be emitted into the room.

The use of scrap wood such as pallets, fence posts and waste timber from building demolitions, etc. should never be used as fuel for your appliance/fire as these are likely to contain toxic pressure treatments and paint. These woods will release toxins when burnt, with the toxins also deposited in the ash and soot and can cause health problems when you breathe in the fumes, when you empty the ash and when you clean the fire. **Never burn these waste timbers.**

Many parts of the UK are in smoke control areas where you cannot emit smoke from a chimney unless you are burning an authorised fuel or using 'exempt appliances' You must not buy or use an unauthorised fuel for use in a smoke control area, as you can be **fined up to £1,000**. To find out if you live in a smoke control area, contact your local council for further information.

Additional rules for open fires

- Never leave an open fire unattended without a fireguard.
- Always use a securely fitted fireguard when children are in the house.
- Never place items which can easily catch fire beside the open fire.

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- Do not overload the fire with more fuel than it can take.

Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Carbon monoxide alarms are early warning devices. The alarm will sound when it detects carbon monoxide above normal levels.

You cannot taste, see or smell Carbon Monoxide fumes, but they are extremely dangerous.

Poisoning from Carbon Monoxide can happen in a matter of minutes or over an extended period depending on the amount of Carbon Monoxide in the air. Symptoms can include:

- Symptoms that only occur when you are in your home and disappear or get better when you leave.
- Others in your home are experiencing similar symptoms (including your pets).
- Black, sooty marks on the front covers of gas fires.
- Sooty or yellow/brown stains on or around boilers, stoves or fires.
- If you get any symptoms when appliances are in use, e.g.; when the boiler is on. Increased condensation on the windows.
- Pilot lights frequently blowing out.
- Yellow instead of blue flames coming from gas appliances or flames are not fully formed (e.g. if flame isn't all the way round on a gas hob burner).

If you suspect Carbon Monoxide poisoning or if your Carbon Monoxide alarm sounds:

- Open doors and windows to ventilate your home.
- If you can do so safely, switch off the appliance.
- Get outside into the fresh air quickly and contact us immediately.
- Seek immediate medical advice.
- See your doctor or go to hospital – let them know that you suspect CO poisoning, they can do a blood or breath test to check.
- Before you return to your home it is very important that you contact our repairs team. We will make an appointment with you for an engineer to inspect your appliances and flues to check if there is a dangerous problem.
- Do not attempt to re-light the appliance until it has been checked by Bernicia and confirmed as working correctly.

We will install a Carbon Monoxide (CO) alarm in every room of your home where a fixed combustion appliance (such as your solid fuel appliance or solid fuel fire) is installed. If you do not have an alarm in each room with a fixed combustion appliance, please contact us and we will arrange to install one.

It is recommended that you test the Carbon Monoxide alarm in your home once a week to be sure it is working. It will also help you and your family to become familiar with the sound of the alarm. Only test your alarms if you can safely access and reach them to do so.

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Press and hold the test button until the alarm sounds (it may take up to 20 seconds) (See picture below). The Alarm will stop sounding shortly after the button is released.

Familiarise yourself with the sound. If the Alarm fails to sound, check that the cover is correctly fitted in place and re-test. If the alarm still does not sound, contact us immediately and we will arrange an appointment with you to carry out any necessary repairs or replace the alarm.



Clean your alarm regularly. Use a soft bristle brush to remove dust and cobwebs from the sides and cover slots. Keep the cover closed while cleaning. Do not vacuum or brush inside the alarm.

Troubleshooting your solid fuel appliance or fire

If your appliance begins to burn slowly, goes out frequently or if you smell or suspect fumes:

- Open doors and windows to ventilate the room.
- If you can do so safely, carefully put out the fire or allow it to burn itself out.
- Get outside and into the fresh air - do not stay in the room any longer than necessary.
- When outside contact Bernicia immediately on 0344 800 3800
- Do not attempt to re-light the appliance until it has been checked by Bernicia and confirmed as working correctly.