

Operation of Solid Fuel Heater

Solid fuel burning in the home provides an attractive and popular form of home heating. However, if solid fuel heaters are not installed and operated in an appropriate way they can be a significant source of air pollution leading to environmental and health problems and a nuisance to neighbours. On a winter weekend, pollution from wood heaters can be as high as 50% of the total air particulate pollution. This is two to three times the particulate pollution from cars.

Correct installation and operation of your solid fuel heater reduces visible smoke to a heat haze or faint smoke within 10 minutes of lighting or refuelling. As a general rule, visual observations of smoke indicate poor operation, lack of maintenance, faulty appliance or installation, or the use of unseasoned fuel.

The installation of new solid fuel heaters must comply with Council's policy regarding solid fuel heaters. This fact sheet relates only to the operation of solid fuel heaters and how Council Officers assess excessive smoke for enforcement purposes.

Legislation

Section 135 (A to D) of the NSW Protection of the Environment Operation Act 1997 enables Council to deal with excessive smoke from solid fuel heaters at residential premises. Excessive smoke means the emission of a visible plume of smoke from a chimney for a continuous period of not less than 10 minutes, including a period of not less than 30 seconds when the plume extends at least 10 metres from the point at which the smoke is emitted from the chimney.

If it appears to Council's officer that excessive smoke is being emitted, or has been emitted at any time within the past 7 days, the officer may give the occupier of the premises a smoke abatement notice. This notice directs the person to ensure that excessive smoke is not emitted from the chimney. The smoke abatement notice has effect 21 days after the giving of the notice and ceases to have effect 6 months after the day on which it is given.

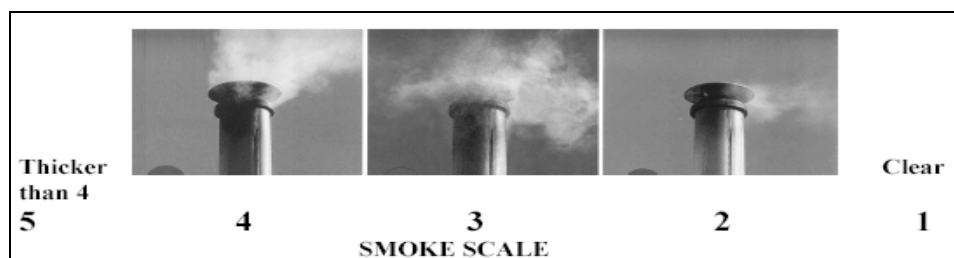
If a person fails to comply with the notice after 21 days by causing excessive smoke, Council may issue a \$200 on the spot fine. If the occupier decides to elect to take the matter to Court the maximum fine is \$3,300.

Prior to the issue of a smoke abatement notice Council's officer would have:

- a) observed a plume of smoke being emitted from the chimney for a continuous period of not less than 10 minutes; and
- b) observed during that period a plume of smoke extending at least 10 metres from the point at which the smoke was emitted from the chimney for a period of not less than 30 seconds.

Please note that while a smoke abatement notice is in place it does not prevent you using the solid fuel heater as long as the emission of smoke is not excessive smoke.

The following "Smoke Scale" diagram can be used to indicate the level of performance of your solid fuel heater. Level 1 and 2 is considered satisfactory. Any emission above 2 is likely to be considered excessive smoke and unsatisfactory.



Operation of Your Solid Fuel Heater

Following these guidelines should minimise the smoke emission from your solid fuel heater and ensure compliance with the NSW Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997.

- If you hear an EPA “Don’t Light Tonight” warning on local television or radio news, consider alternative heating options for that night.
- Check and clean the flue, chimney and baffle regularly. A build up of ash, soot or creosote (a tar like oily deposit) can indicate that your fire is not burning properly and can cause chimney fires and smoke.
- Only use aged and dry wood. Freshly cut wood should be stored for eight to twelve months in a dry, protected location before use. If buying your wood, check with the seller to verify it has been aged. To check if the wood is seasoned, bang two pieces together, they should make a clear, hollow crack.
- Never burn household rubbish, painted or treated wood in your solid fuel heater.
- Start your fire with small pieces of wood or kindling and once the fire is well established add larger pieces of seasoned wood gradually and stacked loosely so that the air circulates around it, burning hot and efficiently.
- Open the air intake and flue for the period between five minutes before and twenty minutes after every time you add fuel.
- Check the chimney. Your fire should only smoke when you first light it and when you add extra fuel, and then only for a few minutes. If there is smoke coming from your chimney increase the air supply to your fire. If smoke continues there may be a problem with the fuel or operating method.
- Do not let your fire smoulder overnight.

Consider your neighbours. If smoke is causing a nuisance you may need to change your fuel or raise the height of your flue. Consult Council if you are having difficulties.

Should you have any inquiries regarding the operation of solid fuel heaters please contact Council on 4227 7111.

For further information contact the NSW Department of Environment and Climate change at –

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/woodsmoke/heatercomplies.htm>

Disclaimers

This Fact Sheet was believed to be correct at the date of its publication.

This Fact Sheet is for general information purposes only and should not be relied upon for legal advice.