

## Stay Warm and Protect the Environment and Your Health this Winter

As the winter season approaches the Environmental Protection Agency is asking home owners to carefully consider their choice of fuels for heating their homes this winter. Of the typical traditional heating options available, the cleanest and most energy efficient means of heating your home is with a gas boiler or an oil boiler. Open fires cause significant smoke and air pollution and are a very inefficient way to heat your home, with most of the heat going straight up the chimney with the smoke, so you should consider other alternatives this winter. You should also have your boiler serviced regularly to ensure it is operating efficiently and saving you money.

If you are considering installing a solid fuel stove then you must ensure that you get a certified stove (carrying the CE marking) from a reputable supplier, and that it is properly installed (in compliance with Building Regulations and the manufacturer's instructions) so that it operates efficiently and safely.

You should also ensure that the stove chimney/flue is appropriate for the solid fuel being used i.e. it should have the correct temperature, soot fire and corrosion resistance and be installed at the appropriate distance from combustible materials. The flue should also terminate in a location compliant with the Building Regulations in order that the fumes will readily disperse and thus reduce any air pollution impacts on your neighbours and your own home/garden. There is a range of clean innovative smokeless solid fuel products, including smokeless coal products, available on the market which are cleaner and which deliver improved air quality and human health benefits.

In order to minimise your heating requirements you should also look to insulate your home. Grants are available from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland for various energy efficiency improvements from attic insulation to boiler upgrades and will make a difference to your heating bill.

Open fires and stoves are still a popular means of home heating in Ireland and for those using open fires or stoves, there are a few important points to consider which will help you to reduce harmful air pollution and operate your fire as efficiently and safely as possible:

- Do not burn waste in your open fire or solid fuel stove. Burning waste is illegal as burning materials such as plastics and magazines results in harmful toxic pollutants which can impact on air quality both within your house and in your immediate neighbourhood. Apart from the potential air quality and health effects, burning waste can result in damage to stoves and chimneys.
- Do not burn treated or coated wood as this can release harmful toxic pollutants which can impact on air quality in your own back garden and also impact on the air quality within your house. Don't burn wood such as chipboard, plywood or MDF as these products use glues and other materials in their manufacture and can result in impacts on outdoor and indoor air quality.
- Do not burn wet turf. Heat from your fire will be used up removing the moisture from the peat before it will burn, and the steam can damage your stove and chimney. Ensure that turf is stored under cover to keep it dry over the winter.

- Do not burn wet timber. Any logs which you burn should be well seasoned to ensure the moisture content is low. Burning wet wood can cause damage to your stove and/or chimney and can lead to a built up of tars/soot in your chimney which can result in chimney fires and corrosion of the flue. Similarly, burning driftwood collected at the seaside can also result in release of harmful chemicals, even when the wood is dry. If you cut wood it will take at least 6 months or longer to properly dry (large logs will take significantly longer). As a rule of thumb when you knock two pieces of seasoned wood together you should hear a hollow crack sound rather than a dull thud. Also, seasoned wood often has cracks/splits around the edges as it dries.
- If you live in an area where there is a ban on the sale and use of smoky coal then you must only burn smokeless coal. Residents in other locations outside these ban areas should also consider using smokeless coal to minimise your impact on the local environment.