



**An Roinn Comhshaoil,
Aeráide agus Cumarsáide**
Department of the Environment,
Climate and Communications

Press Release

Minister Ryan announces public awareness campaign to reduce air pollution from domestic solid fuel fires this winter

The Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, Eamon Ryan T.D., has announced a public awareness campaign on the 'ABC' of Cleaner Air this Winter.

For this heating season, people are being asked to focus on three simple steps – to bring about better air quality and improved health for all by reducing air pollution from domestic fires during the winter ahead.

This campaign centres around three core messages – the 'ABC' for Cleaner Air. These can help to bring about significant improvements in air quality:

- A – Ask yourself: “Do I need to light a fire?” Use other cleaner heating sources instead if possible.
- B – Burn cleaner, more efficient, low smoke fuels and make sure you use the right fuel for your appliance.
- C – Clean and maintain your chimneys and heating appliances at least once a year.

Home fires are the main source of an air pollutant called fine particulate matter (also known as PM2.5). This pollutant is linked to approximately 1,300 deaths in Ireland each year. By taking these simple steps, people can help to safeguard the health of people who are at particular risk of problems caused by air pollution, such as people with asthma, children and the elderly.

The awareness campaign is being launched ahead of the introduction of the new Solid Fuel Regulations that will come into place for 2022 heating season. Up to now, there were rules covering low smoke coal in some cities and towns across the country but not all. The new rules will apply nationwide and to a broader selection of fuels.

Minister Ryan said: “When this Government was formed, we gave a commitment to tackle air pollution caused by domestic solid fuel burning, and we remain committed to doing so. We took a major step earlier this year, with a public consultation on the development of new solid fuels regulations for Ireland.

We received more than 3,500 responses across all strands of the consultation, with a wide variety of suggested regulatory approaches for solid fuels. Having considered the submissions made by the public, health experts and advocacy groups, academia and industry, a framework for legislation has been developed and drafting of the regulations is underway. Our goal is to improve public health by ensuring that people switch to lower smoke rules and that the market is regulated nationally.”

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From September 2022, the following new standards for solid fuels will apply in Ireland:

- Coal, coal-based products, any manufactured solid fuel or peat briquettes will be required to have a smoke emission rate of less than 10g/hour, reducing to 5g/hr by 2025.
- It is not proposed to make any changes to the smoke emission rate for biomass products (that contain coal), as this is already set at 5g/hr.
- The sulphur content permitted for all fuels will be reduced from 2% to 1% over time.
- Wood sold in single units under 2m³ will be required to have a moisture content of 25% or less (moving to 20% within 4 years) and wet wood sold over these volumes will be required to come with instructions for the purchaser on how to dry this wood.
- In order to accommodate those with rights to harvest sod peat, no ban on its burning will be introduced. However, a regulatory regime to reduce its harm in more urbanised areas is under examination.

These regulations will be finalised in the coming months and will be in place for the 2022 heating season. They have already been announced to allow those servicing the domestic solid fuel market to plan accordingly and to continue to invest in less polluting alternatives.

ENDS

NOTES TO THE EDITOR

No Alternative to Solid Fuel Use

If households don't have any alternative, they should continue to light their fire when they need to. We simply ask that they consider their choice of fuel and use low smoke options as outlined in the EPA infographic.

This [infographic](#) highlights a range of heating options from most to least polluting. We would ask everyone to consider if possible, using whatever other less polluting heating methods may be available to them, before thinking of lighting a fire.

If households sometimes light a fire for cosiness or ambience in addition to using one of these other heating sources, it might be useful to check the air quality in their area before they do, particularly on days where the air is still and there is no wind to help disperse the smoke from their chimney. Information on air quality in a number of local areas is available on www.airquality.ie.

Other Steps

In the longer term, retrofitting a home so that it's better insulated and more heat efficient may be an option. Households can do this in stages – focusing on the best options for their own home to help keep as much heat in their home as possible.

Advice, grants and supports are all available from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). See www.seai.ie for more details.

Useful Links:

The Air Quality Map that provides the most recent information on air quality in certain areas:

www.Airquality.ie.

An FAQ document for householders is now available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/81680/1d42b7e6-e286-4af8-a21d-13950d4d3891.pdf>.

An FAQ document for retailers and suppliers is now available at:

<https://assets.gov.ie/81682/01ad3980-e943-4e9e-8b01-7564cf26b414.pdf>.

Interactive map of Low Smoke Zones, including an eircode search facility to allow the user to determine if a particular premises is covered by the ban, is available at:

<https://dceur.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=feee728a0ee1427d9a3973a090a9f292>.

Health Impacts of Solid Fuel

Air quality is a major concern at a global level and is considered the most significant environmental risk to human health. Since the 1990s, medical research has demonstrated links between air pollution and both short and long-term health impacts, including headache, breathing difficulty, eye irritation, and exacerbation of respiratory conditions and increased levels of strokes, cancer, and respiratory and cardiovascular disease.

The European Environment Agency report Air Quality in Europe 2020 indicates that in 2018, there were 1,410 premature mortalities arising from air pollution in Ireland. The vast majority of these (1,300) were attributable to fine particulate matter (PM2.5). The same report indicates 16,200 Years of Life Lost, indicating significantly earlier mortality for those deaths.

Regulation of solid fuel is a recognised means of addressing this. Research indicates that the introduction of the “smoky coal ban” in Dublin in 1990 has resulted in approximately 350 fewer mortalities per year, reducing cardiovascular, cerebrovascular and respiratory mortality in the general population.

Costs of solid fuels

People have to heat their homes and concern is expressed sometimes about the cost impact of further solid fuel regulation on lower income households who cannot afford to upgrade their heating systems. However, the SEAI publishes a Domestic Fuels Comparison of Energy Costs report every three months, and the most recent shows that low smoke coal (ovoids) are the most cost-efficient choice of coal in terms of heat delivered per cent, and the second most cost-efficient overall:

Fuel	Cent/kWh
Premium Coal (bag)	6.97
Standard Coal (bag)	6.83
Low Smoke Ovoids (bag)	6.26