Smoke Control Areas in NI

Taking care of our environment and especially the air that we breath is common sense. When a good quality stove is performing efficiently and burning carbon neutral seasoned wood logs then it is amongst the most environmentally friendly heating solutions you can choose for your home. However, if you live in one of Northern Ireland’s 120 Smoke Control Areas you must by law burn approved smokeless fuels or if you burn wood, then it must be in an approved stove or you risk a potential fine of £1,000 plus the cost of a replacement stove and re-installation.

The Regulations

- Clean air legislation was first introduced in Northern Ireland in 1964 to deal with smogs and the high level of smoke in our towns and cities. Since then there have been huge improvements in our urban air quality and as a result we no longer have to worry about the dangerous smogs of the 1950s and 60s.
- There are currently 120 Smoke Control Areas in Northern Ireland including most of Belfast
- In a Smoke Control Area it is prohibited to emit smoke from your chimney
- Residents must only use authorised smokeless fuels which have been tested to show that when they burn they produce less smoke than ordinary fuels
- Wood is not classified as an authorised smokeless fuel unless it is burned in an authorised ‘clean burning’ appliance also known as a Defra Approved or Smoke Exempt stove.
- A Defra Approved stove has been tested to show that it produces less smoke when it burns wood
- It is still an offence to emit ‘nuisance’ smoke using a Defra Approved stove by burning prohibited fuels or wet or unseasoned wood.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT IF I LIVE IN A SMOKE CONTROL AREA?

If you live in a traditional built-up or urban area then the chances are that it will have been designated as a Smoke Control Area (sometimes known as a Smokeless Zone). You can find out by visiting the Department of the Environment Smoke Control page at www.doeni.gov.uk or talking directly to your local council. Do not assume because neighbours use stoves that they are burning authorised fuels or using an approved stove. Due to the growing popularity of stoves councils now proceed towards prosecutions when they get complaints about smoke. Fortunately, these days there’s a big choice of approved stoves and it won’t cost you any more money to comply with the law.

WHAT FUEL CAN I BURN?

In a non-approved multi fuel stove you can only burn authorised smokeless fuels. A good coal merchant will be happy to advise and recommend a suitable product or alternatively you can go to www.smokecontrol.defra.gov.uk which has a comprehensive list of authorised fuels. Some will suit your stove better than others so it is advisable to experiment with a few different ones. Wood is not an authorise fuel when burned on a non-approved stove.

If you want to burn wood, (it’s can be cheaper and is both sustainable and carbon neutral) then you must use a Defra ‘Approved’ stove. The wood you burn must be dry with a moisture content of less than 20%. You can season this yourself, which can take up to 2 years depending on the wood type and then check the moisture with a specialist meter (around £35). Alternatively bulk buy wood, with a certified moisture content, which is usually kiln dried.

WHAT IS A DEFRA APPROVED STOVE?

A Defra stove allows you to burn wood in a Smoke Control Area because it has been strictly tested for the clean burning of wood. It will not look or perform differently from a regular stove except in one respect – you will not be able to ‘starve’ the fuel of combustion air to the point where it produces smoke. What you get in return is an efficient stove which shouldn’t cause the glass to soot up when low-burning.

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