

Air pollution in BaNES is a huge concern and while tackling vehicle emissions is essential, the progress made will simply not be enough if the council continues to ignore the problem of domestic burning.

In 2024, government data showed that wood burning (22%) has overtaken traffic (18%) as the main source of particulate pollution across the UK, and policies such as Bath's Clean Air Zone, aimed at reducing vehicle emissions, have no impact on wood burning. The data also showed that PM2.5 emissions from home burning went up by 56% in the decade leading up to 2022, as wood-burners rose in popularity, in part driven by the mistaken belief that they're more eco-friendly than other heating methods. Burning wood is not carbon neutral and actually releases more carbon dioxide than coal or gas. In the majority of cases, domestic burning is unnecessary, more expensive than gas central heating and done purely for aesthetic reasons.

According to the Chief Medical Officer's 2022 Air Pollution report“ solid fuels are by far the most polluting method of domestic heating”. It found that a DEFRA approved Ecodesign stove gives off 450 times more PM2.5 pollution than a gas boiler and has an estimated emission rate of six times the mass of PM2.5 than a diesel HGV. A 2025 study found that multifuel Ecodesign stoves emit more ultrafine particles than a standard Ecodesign stove, and that wood briquettes and smokeless coal actually *increased* ultrafine particle exposure by 1.7 and 1.5 times, respectively, compared to seasoned wood, showing that simply switching to smokeless fuel does not make burning safer.

PM2.5 is associated with many conditions, including decreased lung development, asthma, allergies, COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder), pulmonary fibrosis and an hugely increased risk of lung and breast cancer. A 2023 study showed that people who used their wood burner on more than 30 days a year had a 68% increased lung cancer risk compared with people who did not burn wood. Air pollution from burning in UK homes contributes to nearly 2,500 premature deaths and costs the NHS millions of pounds a year.

Despite blocking up our doors and windows, smoke from neighbours' chimneys inevitably comes into our house. Why should our children have to breathe this dangerous air? The complaint system is not fit for purpose.

Between 2024 and 2025, 103 complaints about wood burners were made in BaNES which resulted in just 6 warning letters, 2 inspections and 0 fines.

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health has called for a phase-out of domestic wood burning in urban areas and as a local authority, you have a huge responsibility here. I urge you to follow other councils' (Camden Council, Oxford City Council and Lambeth Council) lead and use all your available channels (social and print media) to inform and discourage domestic burning unless it is the only source of heat. Many people are simply not aware of the realities and residents need to be advised that it leads to potentially serious health problems for themselves and their neighbours.

The scientific evidence is conclusive. Domestic burning is a growing, yet avoidable problem, and action is urgently needed.

Thank you.