1. Can I use the fireplace in my house?
Yes. However parts of the Council area are designated as Smoke Control Areas and you can only use 'smokeless' fuel in these areas. Under the Clean Air Act 1993, it is an offence to emit smoke from a chimney by burning wood or ordinary coal within a Smoke Control Area.

2. Is it an offence to emit smoke from domestic chimneys?
Yes, under the Clean Air Act 1993, it is an offence to emit any smoke from a chimney in a smoke control area other than from burning a smokeless fuel. Any person emitting smoke from a chimney can be prosecuted and may be fined up to £1000. It is also an offence to emit dark smoke from any chimney, (dark smoke is determined by comparing the colour with shades on a chart used by environmental health officers'). Any person emitting dark smoke may be fined up to £1000 if emitted from a private dwelling. In addition smoke may be emitted from a chimney that causes a nuisance or £5000 if from commercial and industrial premises.

3. What is a smoke control area?
Under the Clean Air Act 1993 local authorities may declare the whole or part of the district of the authority to be a smoke control area. It is an offence to emit smoke from a chimney of a building, from a furnace or from any fixed boiler if located in a designated smoke control area. It is also an offence to acquire an “unauthorised fuel” for use within a smoke control area unless it is used in an “exempt” appliance (“exempted” from the controls which generally apply in the smoke control area). The current maximum level of fine is £1,000 for each offence.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has powers under the Act to authorise smokeless fuels or exempt appliances for use in smoke control areas in England.

The council has declared some of the area as Smoke Control Areas and if you require any further information please contact us. Further guidance is provided in L35 ‘Advice on Smoke Control Areas in Wrexham’.

4. What is an authorised fuel?
Authorised fuels are fuels which are authorised by Statutory Instruments (Regulations) made under the Clean Air Act 1993 or Clean Air (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. These include inherently smokeless fuels such as gas, electricity and anthracite together with specified brands of manufactured solid smokeless fuels. These fuels have passed tests to confirm that they are capable of burning in an open fireplace without producing smoke.

5. What are exempt appliances?
Exempt appliances are appliances (ovens, wood burners and stoves) which have been exempted by Statutory Instruments (Orders) under the Clean Air Act 1993 or Clean Air
(Northern Ireland) Order 1981. These have passed tests to confirm that they are capable of burning an unauthorised or inherently smoky solid fuel without emitting smoke.

For more information see;
http://smokecontrol.defra.gov.uk/
http://smokecontrol.defra.gov.uk/background.php#exem

6. What could happen if a smoke from a domestic chimney causes a nuisance?
Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Council is obliged to take action where a statutory nuisance exists. This includes smoke, fumes or gases “emitted from premises so as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance”, and can include nuisance created by smoke from domestic chimneys. To be considered a possible nuisance, the smoke has to be a regularly occurring problem and interfering substantially with your well being, comfort or enjoyment of your property (this includes inside your house or in your garden).

One-off events would not usually be a statutory nuisance but if events are repeated regularly over a period of time, then it could be a statutory nuisance. If the smoke from a domestic chimney causes a nuisance to other people the Council can serve a notice to abate the nuisance or prevent it happening again. If the person responsible does not comply with this notice then they can be fined up to £5,000.

7. How can I reduce solid fuel emissions?
To reduce the amount of pollutants produced from burning solid fuel, make sure you maintain your appliance adequately and ensure fuel is clean and dry. Burning of wet fuel, such as unseasoned wood, will mean that the fuel will burn at a lower temperature and will result in higher levels of emissions, including dioxins, furans, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, particles, and nitrogen oxides. Burning contaminated fuel, such as painted or preserved wood, will also lead to higher emissions.

Current estimates are that the use of solid fuel, bonfires, and waste burning, currently accounts for roughly a fifth of UK emissions of dioxins and furans to air, which are both air pollutants and have a negative impact on health (increasingly stringent legislation has reduced industrial emissions).

Accidental exposure to carbon monoxide (CO) kills more than 50 people each year in England and Wales. It is a colourless, odourless, poisonous gas produced by the incomplete combustion of carbon-based fuels. Incorrectly installed, poorly maintained or poorly ventilated cooking and heating devices are often the main sources. Carbon monoxide poisoning can kill quickly without warning; it can also resemble food poisoning, viral infections, flu or simple tiredness, e.g. headaches, tiredness, feeling sick and difficulty thinking clearly. If you suffer from these symptoms and they could be caused by carbon monoxide exposure, stop using all your cooking and heating appliances and seek urgent medical attention. Call a suitably qualified engineer to check your appliances.

8. How can I prevent carbon monoxide poisoning?
Have all cooking and heating appliances installed and serviced regularly by trained, reputable, registered engineers e.g. Gas Safe Register (for gas appliances), HETAS
(for coal fuelled appliances), OFTEC (for oil appliances) – do not attempt to install or service the appliance yourself!

Do not use poorly maintained appliances and make sure chimneys and flues are clean and not blocked.

Make sure that all rooms are well ventilated when an appliance is being used.

Fit a carbon monoxide alarm that meets European Standard EN 50291 and carries a British or European mark, such as a kite mark. You can be particularly at risk from CO poisoning when you are asleep, because you may not be aware of early symptoms until it is too late. Having an audible CO alarm could wake you and save your life.

9. How should I maintain solid fuel appliances?
The maintenance of solid fuel appliances is very important to ensure safe and efficient operation.

The following general guidelines are recommended but it is important to follow any instructions from your appliance manufacturer.

a) Ensure that your chimney is swept from top to bottom at least once a year. If you are responsible for this work then you may find that a member of the National Association of Chimney Sweeps (NACS) will provide a professional service - contact details below.

b) Air is vital; make sure you have enough ventilation to keep your fire burning properly.

c) Flueways at the back of any boiler should be cleaned at least once a month.

d) Throat plates at the top of any room heater should be removed and cleaned regularly.

e) Check and empty the ashcan regularly and at least once every day. Do not let the ashcan overflow with ash.

You should take immediate action if you smell or suspect fumes – open windows and doors immediately and let the fire go out. Do not relight the fire until you have had your chimney and appliance flueways checked by a qualified engineer. A list of HETAS Registered Engineers who specialise in dealing with solid fuel appliances is available from the Solid Fuel Association.

**FURTHER ADVICE**

To obtain further advice on smoke control issues please contact the Environment and Planning Department:

Telephone: 01978 298989
Email: contact-us@wrexham.gov.uk