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Environmental News Bulletin



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Wood Fired Stoves

A recent study carried out by DEFRA shows that domestic burning of wood in stoves and fireplaces is the biggest source of particulate matter (PM) pollution in the UK.

The study covered emissions from industrial processes, road transport, manufacturing, domestic combustion and other sources. Since 1970 the amount of PM10 and PM2.5 in the air had reduced dramatically due to the reduction in the burning of coal, the introduction of emission standards for transport and the industrial processes, as well as improved efficiency of combustion systems and filtering.

Emissions of PM2.5 from domestic wood burning more than doubled between 2003 and 2019 (from 20,000 to 41,000 tonnes) and increased by 1% between 2018 and 2019. A separate report also found that almost half of those burning indoors were affluent, had other heat sources, such as gas boilers, and were burning fires for aesthetic reasons rather than heat.



PM pollution is hazardous to health due to the very small size, as it has the ability to enter the bloodstream and travel around the body, where it could lodge in the heart, brain or other organs, which could have some serious health effects. Wood burners also significantly increase the indoor PM pollution, and some argue that log burners, stoves and fireplaces should be sold with a health warning.

The research identified the main reasons for use of indoor burners in domestic properties:

- aesthetic reasons or as a "lifestyle choice" - this accounted for the majority of people burning fires;
- traditional reasons - accounted for around 18%;
- older, less affluent and living in more rural areas;
- have no other heating source;
- burning to save money or supplement other sources of heating.

Gary Fuller of Imperial College London and the member of the Government's air quality group said: "We have 8% of UK homes that are responsible for about 40% of PM2.5 pollution."

"Wood burning in homes has crept up under the radar while we all focused our attention on diesel traffic. We can count cars and lorries on our roads to understand the pollution that comes from traffic. But we have very little idea of what people are doing in their own homes and hence the importance of this survey."

"One of the ways to tackle wood burning is to get more information out to people, as they have in New Zealand, to encourage people to burn their wood better. We have to engage and the starting point is to know who is burning wood and why they are doing so, and that is what this survey does."

UK broke air pollution limits for a decade

On 4 March 2021, the court of justice of the EU (CJEU) has ruled that the UK has "systematically and persistently" broken legal limits on air pollution for a decade.

According to the ruling, the toxic levels of nitrogen dioxide (mainly from diesel vehicles) remain illegally high in 75% of urban areas and the UK Government had failed in its legal duty to find a solution to this problem in the shortest possible time. The scientists analysed that polluted air in the UK is responsible for around 40,000 early deaths every year, and road transport is mainly to blame.



The UK Government has been previously defeated on this issue three times following the lawsuits brought by ClientEarth.

The procedures by CJEU were launched before the UK left the EU, and if the UK still fails to improve the air quality, then European Commission could issue a letter of formal notice which will require the Government to improve the situation. If the UK fails to do so, then the Commission could bring the matter to the CJEU again, seeking to have a financial penalty imposed for the breaches. However, it is uncertain whether such a lawsuit will be successful as CJEU might not have the power or the inclination to do this, as the UK is no longer part of the EU.

Sustainable Procurement of Wood

Network Rail will only source virgin timber and timber-derived products from legal and sustainable sources which are credibly certified by a third party and hold full chain of custody.

This requirement will apply to all timber products used by Network Rail, including temporary site works **and products supplied by contractors**. This will guarantee that the timber sourced comes from forests which meet essential principles:

- Comply with all relevant national and international legislation relating to the trade in forest products.
- Conserve biological diversity.
- Avoid the use of highly hazardous pesticides; and
- Are not in areas of armed conflict or civil unrest where there is a direct relationship between the forest products trade and the funding of such conflicts.

As a member of WWF's Global Forest and Trade Network, Network Rail will follow the recommendation to prefer timber products certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC); unless it contradicts other Network Rail's sustainability objectives like minimising transport emissions and favouring local sourcing.

FSC or PEFC?

FSC certification is required for timber products sourced from vulnerable regions such as Africa and South America whilst PEFC can also be used for timber from lower risk areas such as Europe and North America. Network Rail applies due diligence to assess and mitigate the risk of illegal and unwanted forest products entering into the UK market from our supply chain.



Rail Industry Dust and Air Toolbox Talk

<p>What?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• dust, odours, and other emissions can annoy neighbours and may cause health risks at very high concentrations• dust can damage vegetation and crops and effect on local wildlife and watercourses. <p>Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• avoid environmental harm: emission of dark smoke from plant, chimneys and fires is illegal• avoid environmental harm: dust can damage the ecology of a watercourse and affect plant growth, including crops• avoid programme delays: regulators have the power to stop works if dust or other emissions are causing a nuisance• reduce health hazard: dust may cause eye irritation or make asthma worse and could be carcinogenic• reduce health hazard: odours may cause nausea, dizziness of fainting• public relations: dust can settle on neighbours' properties and cars etc, which may lead to local dispute• public relations: poorly controlled emissions and odours from plant or works may lead to valid complaints	<p>Do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ keep surfaces swept and damp down with water at regular intervals during dry weather✓ minimise drop heights into haulage vehicles and conveyors✓ ensure cutting and grinding operations are adequately shielded or wetted✓ sheet over lorries carrying dry materials to or from site✓ keep to site speed limits to minimise dust generation✓ use the wheel wash, for appropriate vehicles, if one is provided on site✓ store fine dry materials within buildings or provide adequate protection from the wind✓ store bulk cement and bentonite in silos✓ position silos and stockpiles away from residential areas or watercourses <p>Don't</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ burn materials on site without approval from a line manager. Permission is required first from regulators✗ use poorly maintained plant. Black smoke may give rise to poor health and can cause a nuisance✗ leave plant and vehicles running if not in use✗ ignore sources of dust and fumes on site, notify a line manager✗ ignore complaints – respond politely and inform a line manager.
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Almost 1bn tonnes of food wasted every year

New research from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has found that food waste from households, retail establishments and the food service industry totals 931 million tonnes each year. Of that waste, almost 570 million tonnes of it occurs at household level (61%), 26% from food services and 13% from retail. The data suggests that in households almost 11% of total food is going to waste every year.

Surprisingly, lower-middle income to high-income countries seems to have similar amounts of food wasted at 74 kg per capita of food wasted each year. This shows that reduction in food waste needs to be a global target, which was not previously realised.

The huge impact of this is compared in the report to food being the third biggest cause of greenhouse gas emissions if food loss and waste were a country. Other impacts mentioned in the report include burdening waste management systems and exacerbating food insecurity which make it a major contributor to the three planetary crises of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste.

The research is said to be the most comprehensive food waste data collection, analysis and modelling to date, generating a new estimate of global food waste. The data has come as a shock to many, with previous estimates well below what has been found in this research.

The report highlights that one gap in data is how much of the food waste is inedible parts. Understanding how food waste in a particular sector is separated between its edible and inedible parts will help stakeholders both in understanding the problem and in designing the solutions.

Of all the ways to help the environment the report highlights that cutting food waste was one of the easiest ways for people to reduce their environmental impact. Coronavirus lockdowns seem to have helped people to plan their food more, with the UK having reduced waste by 20%.

The head of WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Programme), Marcus Gover, who helped write the report, said:

"We are so used to wasting food that we've forgotten its value, and the cost that feeding our growing global population has on the natural world. Like it or not, we in our homes are the most significant part of the problem."



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