

# Sustainable use of fire within outdoor sessions.



Using fire as part of your outdoor session can be a very valuable way of connecting children to the outdoors, learn new skills and self-manage risk. However, it is important to consider a few environmental issues as part of your practise...

## Purpose

Fires are a source of air pollution as burning wood releases a surprisingly large amount of compounds, (including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, benzene and other potentially toxic VOCs) into the atmosphere. Whilst outdoor fires bring huge benefits to children's experiences and learning, the polluting effects of fire should not be ignored.

Before planning fires into your outdoor sessions, you should think about the intended use of your fire to benefit the session or experience.

- Do you really need to have a fire every session?
- What is the purpose?
- Does your fire really need to burn for the entire session?
- Does your fire really need to be that large?
- What size fuel is appropriate?

## Fuel Choice

Your choice of fuel has a big impact on your eco-friendly footprint and should be planned and organised well in advance.

- Collecting deadwood from a site in large amounts or on regular occasions can deplete the natural ecosystem of valuable decomposing materials, which leads to soil erosion and reduced organic matter in the food chain.
- Cutting live trees for fuel reduces site biodiversity and also freshly-cut wood does not often burn well.
- Burning rubbish on a fire can emit toxins into the environment.
- Some species of wood (especially with attached foliage and fungi) can emit harmful toxins and also 'spit' out sparks. You should learn which species is best for camp-fires beforehand.
- Wood should be completely dried out as it burns hotter and releases less pollutants.
- Sorting your fuel into size-piles and working your way up from tinder and kindling, to small then medium-sized sticks, is an effective way of managing your fuel use and fire size.

## Location

Poor choice of location can not only be dangerous, but can also cause devastating environmental impacts. Ensure you avoid peaty soils (as fire can spread underground); non fire-resistant bricks, rocks and materials; locations near to over-hanging trees or other structures; and areas with poor ventilation.

## After your fire

How you leave the site after your fire is very important. Blackened wood and charred logs look unsightly and encourage others, who may not be as safety & environmentally aware, to have fires. Partially burnt fuel and blackened wood should be taken away safely or buried in the environment once fully cooled. It is believed charcoal, if buried, actually helps plants by improving soil pH, increasing water absorption, drawing toxins out of the soil and promoting beneficial bacteria and fungi. 'No trace' of the fire should be left at all.

