Outdoor fires

For outdoor fires such as bonfires to be permitted on University land, there must be good reason for the requirement (e.g. justified academically or as part of an official University event) and the arrangements must be specifically reviewed by the Safety, Health & Environment Unit.

Unless the event forms part of an academic course, an application should always be made using the Ad-Hoc Events Form – see https://www.kent.ac.uk/events/adhoc/. The application should be made well in advance. Estates and other University departments may also raise requirements or objections.

All of the following should be covered by a risk assessment conducted or closely supervised by a competent person:

- Constant attendance by a member of staff who has received official hands-on fire extinguisher training within the past three years
- Means of raising the alarm and summoning emergency response
- Arrangements for the safety of all persons present, including escape routes (enclosed or cordoned areas should generally be avoided) and ensuring safe distance from fire
- During darkness, emergency lighting (for example, a number of designated people with reliable torches)
- Means of extinguishing or limiting the fire (buckets of water and/or suitable fire extinguishers, as assessed)
- Assessment of potential for fire to spread to neighbouring buildings – minimum separation is 8 metres for a fire no bigger than a typical domestic garden bonfire, but in some cases a greater distance will be necessary
- Assessment of potential for fire to spread through vegetation or other materials
- No materials other than clean wood may be burned, except for minimal quantities of kindling or paper – this is a strict requirement relating to both the Clean Air Act 1993 (potential for “dark smoke”) and the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (regarding waste)
- If wood to be burnt includes resinous types such as pine, an understanding of fire growth rates and arrangements for limiting the quantities added – resinous timber and foliage will sometimes conflagrate instantaneously
- Control of flammables: small quantities of proprietary firelighter blocks might be permitted if necessary, but other accelerants must be prohibited, and no flammable liquids or gases may be present in the vicinity – strict requirement
- Potential for nuisance to other people including neighbours (which may depend on weather conditions on the day) should be considered and avoided
- Potential for smoke to affect roads or paths (which may depend on weather conditions on the day) should be considered and avoided
- Potential for disturbance to sensitive habitats should be considered and avoided
- Consideration of possible unplanned attendance, behaviour or influence which could affect safety, including e.g. effects of alcohol; gate-crashers
• Arrangements for ensuring the fire is extinguished or otherwise safe when left, e.g. damping down adequately
• Ensuring the site is returned to its previous state after the event
• Suitable briefing for all people with designated roles
• Ensuring Campus Security awareness of the event and precautions.

Note that the SHE Unit’s review of the risk assessment as stipulated above does not constitute “approval” as such or absolve the organiser or relevant staff members of any responsibility or duty.

**Barbecues**

Barbecues are especially prone to both fire safety and food hygiene risks unless appropriate precautions and competencies are applied. Staff wishing to provide barbecues at the University should engage Kent Hospitality Catering for this purpose.

Students are not prohibited from having small private barbecues outdoors, but the following guidelines should be followed:

• Preferably, the barbecue emplacements provided at Park Wood should be used
• Do not take kitchen furniture outside
• Only small disposable barbecues should be used (larger re-useable types, and especially gas-fuelled units, are prohibited)
• Keep well away from buildings, wooden fences, trees, etc.
• Do not place on combustible surfaces such as wooden furniture, cardboard, dry leaves, etc.
• Follow the manufacturer’s instructions; do not use any accelerants
• Keep all combustible materials at a safe distance; take care not to catch clothing alight
• Do not leave the barbecue unattended
• Check that all food is thoroughly cooked before eating, including the inside
• Never bring the barbecue into a building
• After use, ensure the disposable barbecue is completely extinguished and cool – they can continue to smoulder for hours – dousing with plenty of water is recommended. Never place a hot or warm barbecue in a waste bin.

Should any fire or barbecue on University premises appear to be unsafe or fail to comply with these requirements at any time, Campus Security are authorised to extinguish it immediately and remove any prohibited items, at their discretion.

**Sky lanterns**

Sky lanterns (also known as Chinese lanterns) are strictly prohibited. The reason is given in section 6.1.2 of the DEFRA report “Sky Lanterns and Helium Balloons: an Assessment of Impacts on Livestock and the Environment”.

Andrew Briggs  
Fire Safety & Environment Adviser  
University of Kent  
19th Oct 2016