

# Reduce the risk of heath fires this summer



Last year in Surrey Heath two large scale fires broke out on heath and woodland in the borough, destroying more than 124 acres of countryside. Firefighters from across Surrey (and crews from Berkshire) spent days extinguishing the flames on Old Dean and Chobham Common in April 2007.

As well as being potentially fatal to humans, the fires threaten wildlife and many areas of beauty across the borough. Many animals are unable to escape from fire and while birds can fly away, nests and eggs that are left behind are often destroyed.

With summer approaching and the heathland drying out, it is important that residents and visitors keep in mind safety advice that could help prevent the risk of wildfires in Surrey Heath.

## How to reduce the risk of heath and woodland fires

Follow these tips to reduce the risks of wildfires in the countryside:

- Extinguish cigarettes and other smoking materials properly – NEVER throw cigarette ends out of car windows
- Do not leave bottles or glass in woodlands as the sun shining through glass can start fires – Take them home or put them in a waste or recycling bin
- On most heathlands, it is illegal to light any fire, including barbecues, without the permission of the landowner
- Only use barbecues in suitable and safe areas and never leave them unattended.
  - Keep young children and ball games away from barbecues
  - Ensure your barbecue is fully extinguished and cold before disposal and NEVER discard used coals anywhere except in bins designed specifically for the purpose.
- Avoid using open fires in the countryside

- If you see a fire in the countryside, report it immediately, and leave the area. Find a map reference where possible, otherwise give a landmark such as a farm or pub to help fire crews locate the fire.
- Do not attempt to tackle a fire that cannot be put out with a bucket of water

## What to do if a fire does break out in the countryside:

- Call the Fire Service immediately
- Keep well away – heathland fires can spread fast
- Only attempt to put it out if you are certain it is safe to do so
- If you have livestock which may be affected, prepare to evacuate them if necessary

A fire in the countryside can cause many thousands of pounds of damage and kill hundreds of wild animals and birds.

Many such fires are caused by carelessness of people using the countryside. Ten seconds of carelessness can cause fires that take 10 hours to put out and 10 years to re-grow.

## Eliminate the risk of fire with a Home Fire Risk Check

Households across Surrey Heath can help to reduce the risk of fire with a free home fire safety visit from Surrey Fire and Rescue crews.

The Home Fire Risk Check involves a visit from your local fire station at a time convenient to you. Firefighters will use a simple questionnaire to look at potential risks in the home and offer advice on the installation and maintenance of smoke alarms.

They will also give guidance on how to stay safe from fire — including kitchen hazards, safe disposal of smoking materials, candles, heaters, electric blankets and dangers from harmful substances.

The Home Fire Risk Check focuses on the three key areas of fire safety — prevention, detection and devising an escape plan.



To arrange a free Home Fire Risk Check please call the request line on Freephone 0800 085 0767.