

Health & Air Quality at Home

1 – General Advice

Poor air quality impacts on health. There are several things you can do to minimise pollutants in the home and reduce its effects.

Open fires

Open fireplaces cause poor air quality both inside and out due to the fine particles in smoke and ash. Southwark is a [Smoke Control Zone](#) so it is an offence under the [Clean Air Act](#) to a) burn unauthorised fuel on an open fire, b) have an appliance that is not approved by the government for use in a [Smoke Control Zone](#) or c) use the wrong fuel specified for your approved appliance.



You can have a fire in your home if you burn smokeless fuel or use an approved appliance with the correct fuel for its design as specified by the manufacturer.

The UK Government website has a list of fuels and appliances that are either approved or exempt. This can be found at:

Fuels – smokecontrol.defra.gov.uk/fuels.php

Appliances – smokecontrol.defra.gov.uk/appliances.php

Smoking

Smoking is one of the biggest causes of death and illness in the UK and greatly increases your risk of developing a serious health condition. You can become very ill if you smoke or regularly inhale other people's smoke (passive smoking).

Solvents

New furniture, upholstery and floor coverings like carpet and lino are treated with flame retardants and other chemicals during their manufacture. They can still be releasing solvents and fumes when delivered to or installed in your home. Paints and varnishes can also contain solvents that cause indoor air pollution.

Make sure you ventilate rooms well until the 'new' odour has faded, or for at least a week, if they have been freshly painted or have had new furniture or floor coverings installed or fitted.

Asbestos

Asbestos was widely used as a fireproof insulation material in buildings and can be found in some older types of Artex. It is now known to cause cancer and was banned in 1999.

If asbestos is in good condition (i.e. not flaky or dusty) and is located somewhere where it won't be easily accidentally damaged then it is unlikely to be a risk.

In older homes it is advised that before starting any DIY project that might disturb materials that could contain asbestos, you consult the [HSE website](https://www.hse.gov.uk) for more information at www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos