

Help prevent wildfires

Visitors to rural areas and residents are advised to be vigilant for wildfires.

The risk of wildfires

The current spell of dry weather combined with the current hot conditions has resulted in elevated wildfire risk across Northern Ireland.

With the weekend and summer holidays approaching, there will be an expected increase in members of the public taking this opportunity to explore the countryside,

Wildfires are not natural, they are almost always started by humans either deliberately or through carelessness. They put lives at risk, destroy our surroundings and the wildlife in them, and are a real cost to society.

Members of the public visiting the countryside should take particular precautions so as not to accidentally cause wildfires through their activities.

Under the current conditions, any ignition source in hazardous fuels may give rise to wildfire development and spread, particularly in areas with dead grasses, gorse, forestry and heather and, can cover extensive areas in a very short period of time and may be hazardous to human life and wildlife.

Preventing wildfires

If you are in the countryside:

- extinguish cigarettes and other smoking materials properly
- never throw cigarette ends out of car windows
- only use barbecues in designated areas and never leave them unattended
- make sure that barbecues are fully extinguished and cold before disposing of their contents
- avoid using open fires in the countryside
- do not leave bottles or glass behind – sunlight shining through glass can start a fire
- be considerate in parking vehicles so as not to impede access by emergency vehicles

More information on fire safety outdoors can be found on the page below:

What to do if you see a fire

If you see a fire in the countryside:

- report it immediately to the [Fire & Rescue Service](#)
- do not attempt to tackle fires that cannot be put out with a bucket of

water

- leave the area as soon as possible
 - if you see someone setting fires, report it to the [PSNI](#)
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Certain homosexual offences can be removed from criminal records

Date published: 28 June 2018

If you have a conviction or caution for a homosexual offence, which is no longer criminal, you can apply to have it removed from police and court records.

Offences which are no longer criminal

The decriminalised offences are:

- buggery
- gross indecency
- procuring others to commit homosexual acts

The activity must have been:

- consensual
- with a person aged 17 or older

It must also not be an offence today. Sexual activity in a public toilet is not included as it is still illegal.

If you received a conviction or caution for any of the decriminalised offences, you can apply to have your record wiped clean or 'disregarded'.

Receiving a disregard

A disregarded offence means it will be treated as never having happened and won't appear in criminal record checks. You also don't need to disclose it on application forms or in court cases. A successful application also leads to an automatic legal pardon.

Posthumous pardons

Anyone who has since died but was convicted of a decriminalised consensual

homosexual offence with someone over 17, will be automatically pardoned.

How to apply

It is free to apply for a disregard. Go to the link below for more information on pardons and disregards and to complete the application form:

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[Check if you're eligible for Rate Rebate](#)

Date published: 19 June 2018

Tenants and homeowners should check if they're eligible for the new Rate Rebate Scheme. Ratepayers getting Universal Credit can get a rebate on their rates. This is being rolled out along with Universal Credit across Northern Ireland.

Rate Rebate

To apply for Rate Rebate, you must:

If you're a tenant or homeowner, you can only make a claim for Rate Rebate once you've been awarded Universal Credit.

Any claim should be made as soon as possible following your first Universal Credit payment.

More information is available on this page:

How to apply

You have to register for an online account using your own email address. Once you have an account, you can apply online at this link:

You can also call Land & Property Services on 0300 200 7802.

If Universal Credit has not been yet rolled out in a particular area or someone is not eligible for Universal Credit, such as pensioners, rates support will continue through [Housing Benefit](#).

More useful links

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[Be aware of Giant hogweed and avoid contact](#)

Date published: 18 June 2018

Be aware of Giant hogweed and avoid contact with it, as it can cause blistering and swelling on the skin. The plant is usually found growing in areas of damp soils, such as river banks.

Giant hogweed

[Giant hogweed](#) grows up to between three and five metres high, which is what helps identify it as it looks similar to hogweed and cow parsley.

You should [report any sightings](#) of the plant.

Giant hogweed contains a sap which irritates skin when it is exposed to sunlight.

Symptoms are usually noticeable within 24 hours and include blistering and swelling on the skin, which may be made worse by over-exposure to the sun.

What to do

If you come into contact with Giant hogweed:

- cover the affected skin immediately to avoid exposure to the sun
- wash the skin with cold water

If there is blistering or the contact was with the eyes, you should [seek medical advice](#).

More useful links

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[Keep children safe from burns and scalds](#)

Date published: 08 June 2018

It's important that parents, relatives and carers are aware of the hazards which can lead to burns and scalds, and take steps to make sure children are kept safe.

Reduce the risk of accidents

Accidents can happen quickly in or around the home, sometimes it takes just seconds, and occasionally these can lead to [burns and scalds](#).

But these accidents can easily be prevented by being aware of the dangers and hazards that are in the home, and taking steps to reduce the risks and make the home as safe as possible.

Hot appliances, liquids, and bath water are responsible for more than half of all burns and scalds, with young children being particularly vulnerable.

Be aware that:

- hot drinks can still scald 15 minutes after they've been made and can result in years of skin graft treatment – make sure hot drinks are out of reach of babies and children

- hot water scalds in seconds – run the cold water first and always check the temperature of bath water
- hair straighteners can get very hot very quickly and cause serious burns that scar for life – keep out of the reach of children and put them away safely after use

You can get more advice, including a video showing the dangers in the home, at this link:

Prevention is always better than a cure.

More useful links

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