

Best practice guidance for firewood suppliers

The guidance here has been based on feedback from firewood users, and on best practice in the firewood supply sector.

1. Firewood product(s)

➤ **Season firewood before delivery**

When a tree is cut down or pruned, the resulting cut timber can be very wet - over 70% water in some cases. The cut timber needs to be either left to dry for an extended period or kiln-dried before it can be burned as firewood.

Wood for burning in wood stoves should have ideally been seasoned (air dried in a well ventilated location) for at least 2 years or kiln dried to a maximum of 25% moisture content (water).

If you are based in a damp part of the country, it is possible that the ambient moisture content in the air will prevent the timber from becoming sufficiently dry through standard air drying. In this case, you should consider using a more proactive form of drying. For example, you could stack the wood on pallets in a polytunnel which is open at both ends, facing into the prevailing wind. That way, drying can be carried out by a combination of wind and solar energy.

➤ **Understand your customer expectations**

Most customers prefer to purchase firewood which is ready or almost ready to burn. However, some customers are happy to receive firewood which has not been seasoned, because they plan to season it themselves. It is important to ensure that the customer knows when you deliver unseasoned wood, and will have to wait until they burn it.

Many customers order and expect to be able to burn firewood straightaway and some will do so, regardless of whether the wood is ready to burn or not.

➤ **Cut to length and size the customer requires**

Different stoves / boilers take logs of varying lengths ranging from less than 30cm (1') to in excess of 60cm (2'). To save customers (some of whom might not be capable or willing) having to further cut and split logs to fit them in a stove, it is good practice to ask them what length of log they require, and to supply to this if possible.

➤ **Let the customer know if the firewood comes from guaranteed well-managed sources**

Some more environmentally aware customers are likely to be interested in the source of the firewood you supply. If you do not already know, it could be useful to establish whether the timber comes from guaranteed well managed sources.

➤ **Hardwood and softwood - give the customer the same value**

There is a discernible difference in the burning performance of hardwoods and softwoods, and it can be important to the end customer to know what type of wood they will receive from you. Some customers will prefer to receive hardwoods wherever possible, but this may not be possible if the only local timber you can obtain is softwoods.

If you supply softwood only, or a combination of hard and soft wood, you should take into account that in terms of comparable weight, hardwoods and softwood provide the same energy output - but that, due to the less dense nature of softwoods, the same weight of softwood can be up to 50% more bulky than that of a comparable hardwood load. Your pricing policy should take this into account to ensure that the customer receives the same level of value regardless of whether you deliver hard or softwood firewood products.

➤ **Supply clean and uncontaminated firewood**

Debarking can make the timber cleaner to handle. Careful stacking when seasoning should ensure that the wood is kept free of contaminants.

➤ **Supply kindling which is ready to burn**

Customers expect tinder-dry kindling.

2. Service

➤ **Respond promptly to customer orders**

Customers need to feel that their business is important to you. Responding promptly to their contact is a key first step towards this.

➤ **If you deliver firewood, let your customers know when you will deliver and keep to the times you give**

Unless a delivery is a repeat delivery where the customer knows approximately how long they can expect to wait and from prior experience you know exactly what to do with the timber, the customer will be anxious for you to get back in touch with a delivery time. In many cases they will want to be there when you deliver, and this can involve planning ahead. Getting in contact to agree a mutually convenient delivery time is another key element of keeping the customer reassured and satisfied with your service.

➤ **Provide customers with advice if they require it**

Some customers are fully aware of all the steps towards effective firewood management, but others, particularly as the market develops, may never have had direct experience of working with firewood. As their primary point of contact with the firewood sector, it is possible that they will rely on you to answer questions they may have. You need to ensure that any advice you give is accurate and useful.

➤ **Provide a year round service**

If you do, you have the opportunity to tell your customers about this - so that they can plan ahead in good time for the forthcoming winter, and order early. This can also help towards the balancing out the seasonality of your firewood business.