

GAEC 6: Soil and Organic Matter – Maintenance



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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The aim of these standards is to protect the soil. Environmental benefits of maintaining habitats and biodiversity are of national importance.

Both farming and biodiversity benefit from good healthy variation in vegetation, structure and condition. Carefully planned, periodic, controlled burning can be beneficial for agriculture, game management, wildlife conservation and the wider environment. Ill-considered burning can be counter-productive by damaging valuable grazing, habitats and historic features as well as affecting soil and water quality.

Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) (Wales) Regulations 2007 (EIA) screening is required on all uncultivated land and semi-natural areas when agricultural intensification projects are planned. It is a breach of the regulations to proceed with such projects, without either obtaining a screening decision that the project will not have significant effects or obtaining EIA consent.

Main requirements

Crop Residues, Heather and Grass Burning

- Do not burn crop residues on agricultural land, unless to eradicate plant pests, or with the consent of the Welsh Government. Maintain evidence of either.
- Ensure a heather and grass burning management plan has been prepared and that any proposed burning is done in accordance with the provisions of that plan.
- Prior to commencing the heather and grass burn and during the entire period of the operation, ensure all reasonable precautions are made to prevent injury or damage to any adjacent property. Do not create hazards to road users and the public.
- Ensure sufficient persons or equipment to control and regulate the heather and grass burning are in place during the entire period of the burn.
- Complete all heather and grass burning within the permitted period, and only during in daylight hours. The periods are:

- 1 October – 31 March in upland areas (defined as Severely Disadvantaged Area (SDA)).
- 1 November – 15 March elsewhere.
- Comply with national legal requirements and restrictions for heather and grass burning, together with local by-laws.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

- Apply for EIA screening from the Welsh Government for relevant land improvements. Land is likely to be deemed to be semi-natural and uncultivated if the proportion of improved species such as white clover/ryegrasses are less than 25-30%.
- Comply with the conditions of the EIA consent. This includes EIA (Forestry) regulations where applicable, such as projects for afforestation, deforestation, forest road works and forest quarry works.
- Comply with stop, consent, enforcement and remediation notices served by either the Welsh Government or Natural Resources Wales.

Field checks

- Burning of arable crop residues is not taking place unless for plant health reasons, education and research (with the consent of the Welsh Government) or the disposal of straw stack or broken bales.
- For heather and grass burning, a Burning Management Plan is in place.
- Heather and grass burning is taking place in the permitted periods.
- Check that Environmental Impact Assessment consent has been granted for improvement works, or for carrying out activities on semi-natural and uncultivated land.

Good practice

Crop Residues, Heather and Grass Burning

- Draw up a programme of essential heather and grass burning on a sound rotational basis – this should be included in the Burning Management Plan.
- Inform adjoining landowners of your burning plans beforehand and inform the local Fire and Rescue Service. Inform them when fires have been extinguished.
- Do not burn if the weather is unsuitable for safe and controlled burning, including when it's too dry. Do not burn if the wind is too strong or if wind direction is

changeable. If conditions worsen burning should be stopped immediately.

- Aim for quick 'cool burns' which remove the dwarf shrub canopy, but leave behind a proportion of 'stick' and does not cause damage to the moss layer or expose the soil surface.
- Control the flanks of a fire at the desired width leaving the fire front to spread in a predetermined direction, with at least one flank defined by a firebreak. Choose natural breaks in vegetation for the burn wherever possible, or where none are present, create firebreaks - firebreak width should be at least 2½ times the expected flame length.
- Do not burn on designated sites (e.g. SSSIs) or Scheduled Ancient Monuments without first seeking consent from the appropriate authority.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

- If it is unclear whether the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations apply to a particular project/activity, then advice should be sought from your nearest Welsh Government regional office.

For further information please contact:

Welsh Government

Natural Resources Wales

See 'Useful Contacts' factsheet within this pack