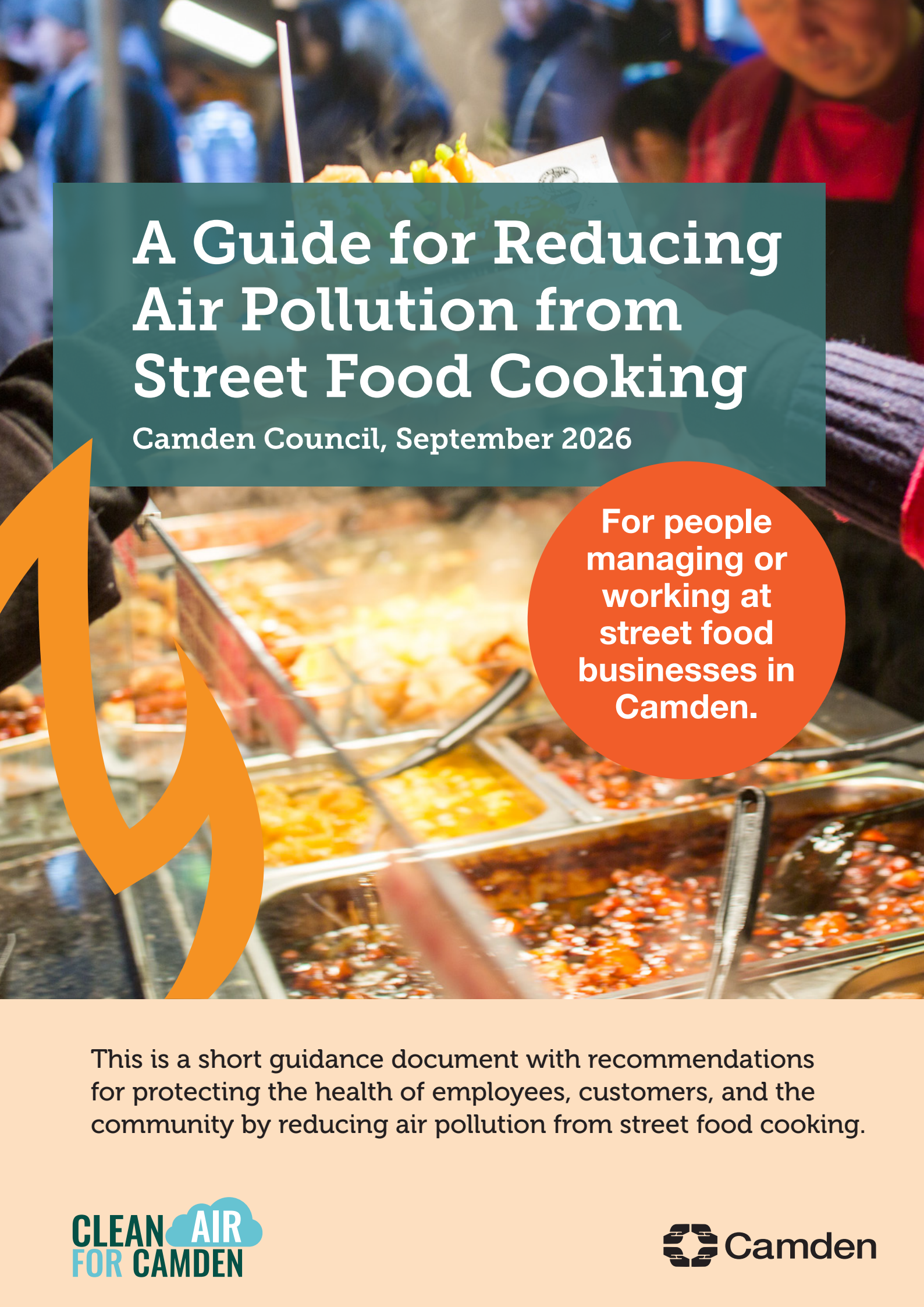




A Guide for Reducing Air Pollution from Street Food Cooking

Camden Council, September 2026



For people managing or working at street food businesses in Camden.

This is a short guidance document with recommendations for protecting the health of employees, customers, and the community by reducing air pollution from street food cooking.

Why is this guidance important?

Camden street food businesses are important for our local economy. They provide jobs, and they bring people together, celebrating many different food cultures and attracting visitors to Camden.

 **Commercial cooking can release air pollution (an invisible combination of particles, gases and chemicals) into the air we breathe.**



Air pollution can cause mild health issues such as sneezing, coughing and lung irritation. It can also cause more serious long-term harm like lung disease, asthma, and bronchitis.



Air pollution is linked to heart diseases including hypertension, strokes and heart attacks. Air pollution is also linked to lung cancer and dementia.

The main types of air pollution from street food cooking are:

- particulate matter (PM_{2.5})
- nitrogen dioxide (NO₂)
- and volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

Sometimes we can see air pollution (like smoke from burning food and cooking oils) but often we cannot see it or smell it.



Commercial cooking makes up roughly a quarter of all PM2.5 air pollution emissions in Camden.

Cooking produces air pollution because pollutants are emitted by burning fuels in cooking appliances, and also directly from foods when they are heated or burned. Specifically, air pollution is produced by street cooking from:

- Cooking, grilling, or barbecuing with charcoal or wood (wood burning)
- Open grilling or roasting fatty meat products
- Burnt food particles on hot grill surfaces (charring)
- Cooking with gas
- Oil, sauces, and marinades dripping onto hot charcoals, wood, or other hot surfaces
- Deep frying or frying in oils



Figure 1: Air pollution could be produced from heating sources (wood, coal, gas) and from heated food such as fried/grilled meat and fats and oil

The advice in this guide will help to protect your health and the health of people around you.

The guide is presented in the following sections.

- 1 Cooking fuel types
- 2 Cooking methods
- 3 Cleaning and maintaining cooking stoves, grills and surfaces

1. Cooking fuel types

Using cleaner energy sources for cooking will help to reduce air pollution.

Electric cooking appliances are the best option because they produce no air pollution from the heat source. This makes electric appliances the best option. Electric appliances include induction hobs, ceramic hobs, electric ovens and electric bain-marie.

Even in their best conditions, gas hobs and gas ovens produce nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and PM_{2.5} pollution. Gas appliances are also at risk of leaking other pollutants when the gas or air flow is obstructed or poorly maintained. These other pollutants include carbon monoxide (CO), methane gas and formaldehyde, which is a harmful type of airborne chemical called a volatile organic compound (VOC).

Switching to electric from gas cooking is safer for you and others around you. However, cooking with gas does produce less pollution than using charcoal or wood.

 **The PM_{2.5} air pollution from charcoal and wood burning has been linked to diseases including hypertension, heart disease, asthma, lung cancer, stroke and dementia. Gas appliances may not be the most environmentally friendly option, but they are better than charcoal/wood barbecues, ovens and grills.**

Replacing a gas stove, oven, or grill with an electric one will avoid the air pollution from gas cooking. Replacing a wood pizza oven or charcoal grill with gas or preferably electric will help to reduce pollution and is highly recommended.



Highest pollution

Wood and charcoal cooking

- Fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) produced
- Black carbon produced
- Carbon monoxide (CO) produced
- Volatile organic compounds (VOC) produced



Moderate pollution

Gas cooking

- Nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) produced
- CO produced
- Ultrafine particulate matter (UFP) produced

Lowest pollution

Electric cooking

- No emissions from the cooking heat source
- No NO₂, VOC or PM leaked or emitted whilst appliances not in use
- Air pollution limited to emissions from heated and burnt food



2. Cooking methods

Making small changes to cooking methods and food preparation practices can help to reduce air pollution, regardless of the cooking fuel and appliances used.

- ✓ Use oils that have a high smoke-point to reduce air pollution from frying, roasting, or grilling
- ✓ Aim to use less oil for cooking, and especially for grilled meat products
- ✓ Avoid reusing oils for frying as this increases smoke and VOC air pollution
- ✓ Prevent oils and fats dropping onto heated cooking surfaces, as this produces smoke
- ✓ Trim off excess fat from meat products before frying, smoking or grilling
- ✓ Reduce food preparation times by pre-cooking meat products from a central kitchen before coming to the market to finish up cooking (but be sure to follow food hygiene and storage guidelines)
- ✓ Stir fries could be made by first heating up the meat or vegetables before spraying on a little oil instead of heating oil before food is added
- ✓ Where possible, reducing frying or grilling times will also reduce PM_{2.5} and VOC air pollution from food preparation



3. Cleaning and maintenance



Cleaning and maintaining your equipment can help to reduce air pollution too. Continuous cooking on surfaces with burnt food or oil spills can produce avoidable smoke and air pollution.

- ✓ Clean cooking surfaces regularly, especially surfaces that are directly in contact with food (for example, grill surfaces and barbecue surfaces)
- ✓ Drain off excess oils from cooking surfaces and dispose of them responsibly. To dispose of cooking oil waste in Camden, you can take it to a local reuse and recycling centre, seal it in a general household waste bin, or arrange a commercial collection. **Liquid cooking oil must never be poured down drains or put into standard food waste or dry recycling bins**
- ✓ While grilling, ensure any burnt fats and charred food are regularly cleaned off. This will reduce the smoke and pollution produced from cooking surfaces
- ✓ Avoid cleaning with chemical-based and scented cleaning products because these can contain harmful volatile chemicals. Look out for cleaning product labels that contain formaldehyde, benzene, chloroform, 1,4-dioxane, and glycol ethers. These chemicals are known to cause cancers and could damage the brain and lungs
- ✓ If you are using charcoal or wood, you must only use Defra authorised fuels, such as approved kiln-dried wood, smokeless charcoal, and standard lighter fluids to get the fire going
- ✓ Make sure charcoal and wood fuels are carefully extinguished (put out) at the end of cooking and not left to smoulder
- ✓ Avoid the use of plastics on heated and cooking surfaces
- ✓ All cooking appliances and air filtration and extraction equipment should be cleaned and maintained regularly according to the manufacturer's instructions

Consideration for the health and wellbeing of people that live, work, and do business around you

It is your duty to operate your business in a responsible manner so that your cooking and other business-related activities do not negatively affect the health and wellbeing of your customers and other people that live, work, and do business around you.



Excessive smoke, noise, or odours could constitute a nuisance. You could face enforcement action from Camden Council if you cause a statutory nuisance to people who live or work near to where you do business.

Further information

For further information on the other sources of air pollution, the impacts of air pollution on human health, and how we are working to protect the health of everyone who lives, works and learns in Camden, please visit the Camden Council air quality webpages or contact the Air Quality team.

<https://www.camden.gov.uk/air-quality>

AirQuality@camden.gov.uk

To report poor air pollution in Camden please use the online e-form:

<https://www.camden.gov.uk/reporting-air-pollution>

Camden supports the **Healthier Catering Commitment**, which helps food businesses to make small, meaningful changes, so customers can enjoy meals that support their wellbeing. Visit <https://www.camden.gov.uk/healthier-catering-commitment> to find out how signing up to the Healthy Catering Commitment could benefit your business.