



Fireplace and Chimney Safety

There's nothing better than curling up in front of your fireplace during a cold winter evening, but before you light the first flame of the season, there are a few fireplace safety tips that you should keep in mind.

Cleaning Your Chimney

Approximately 25,000 chimney fires occur each year because of buildup in the chimney that has not been cleaned out from the previous winter season. While it may seem trivial, one way to prevent a fire from occurring in your home is to have a chimney sweep done each year. The chimney is the main escape for fire extracts, such as water vapor, unburned wood particles, tar fog and various minerals. These extracts create what is called creosote, a build-up of residue in the chimney. This build-up is very flammable and can become a hazard if it is not properly cleaned. Chimney sweeps remove this creosote.

The chances of a chimney fire increase from the following:

- **Restricted air supply** – This occurs if the doors on the fireplace or the damper are closed. Another risk of leaving the damper closed is smoking out the house.
- **Unseasoned wood** – Wood burning in the fireplace should be dry, never wet. Wet wood takes too much energy to burn and creates a lot of smoke.
- **Cool chimney temperature** – A cooler-than-normal chimney temperature can result in condensation, which speeds up the process of creosote forming. If you have a chimney that runs on the exterior of your home, you may want to consider having the chimney inspected often and cleaned twice a year, instead of just once.

Certified Sweepers

According to the Chimney Safety Institute of America (CSIA), only certified chimney sweepers should clean chimneys because they have been trained and understand the latest techniques for cleaning a chimney.

To find a certified sweeper in your area, visit the CSIA Web site at <http://www.csia.org/>; and in the box on the left, type your Zip Code, and then click the **Search** button. You also can view appropriate cleaning supplies and actions involved in a chimney sweep and inspection through the Web site's tutorial.

When to Clean

Fireplaces are heavily used in the winter months and should be cleaned each year before the first use. If you decide to clean it after winter is over, it is a good idea to have the chimney inspected before use the next year, as there could be outside residue built up from the spring and summer. The inspection does not mean it will be cleaned. To prevent outside debris from getting in the chimney, be sure to close the damper when it is not in use, and put the cap on the top.

General Fireplace Safety Tips

In addition to making sure that your fireplace is cleaned properly each year, here are a few other safety tips you should know:

- ❑ Burn only dry, seasoned wood; and dispose of the cooled ashes in a container outside of your home.
- ❑ Use a fireplace screen for protection against flying embers.
- ❑ Keep at least three feet of clearance around the fireplace to let air circulate. Also, keep furniture and flammable items away from the heat source.
- ❑ Make sure the flue is open before lighting a fire, and never close the flue while a fire is still smoldering.
- ❑ When lighting a gas fireplace, strike your match first, and then turn on the gas.
- ❑ Do not close your damper until the fire is completely out.
- ❑ Never use gasoline or lighter fluid to start a fire.
- ❑ Avoid burning wrappings or plastic items. These may give off toxic chemicals in the smoke.
- ❑ Never leave a fire burning unattended in the fireplace.

Safeguard Your Home from Chimney Fires

Sitting in front of a fireplace is a great way to relax at the end of the day and warm your home on a cold winter evening. By making sure that your chimney is cleaned each year and that you follow the recommended fireplace safety tips, you are helping to safeguard your home from preventable chimney fires.