



Southwestern Insurance Information Service

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Fireplace Safety

Learn how to keep this beautiful feature from becoming a deadly hazard

More than one-third of Americans use fireplaces, wood stoves and other fuel-fired appliances as primary heat sources in their homes. Unfortunately, many people are unaware of the fire risks of heating with wood and solid fuels. Heating fires account for 36 percent of residential home fires in rural areas every year. Often these fires are due to creosote buildup in chimneys and stovepipes. All home heating systems require regular maintenance to function safely and efficiently. These fire-safety steps can help keep fireplaces burning safely.

Keeping fireplaces and wood stoves clean

- Have your chimney or stove inspected and cleaned annually by a certified chimney specialist. • Clear the area around the hearth of debris, decorations and flammable materials. • Always use a metal-mesh screen with fireplaces.
- Leave glass doors open while burning a fire.
- Install stovepipe thermometers to monitor flue temperatures.
- Keep air inlets on wood stoves open and never restrict air supply to fireplaces. Doing otherwise can cause creosote buildup.
- Use fire-resistant materials on walls around wood stoves.

Burning fuels safely

- Never use flammable liquids to start a fire.
- Use only seasoned hardwood. Soft, moist wood accelerates creosote buildup. • Build small fires that burn completely and produce less smoke. • Never burn cardboard boxes, trash or debris.

For Additional Information:

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- When building a fire, place logs at the rear of the fireplace on a supporting grate.
- Never leave a fire in the fireplace unattended. Extinguish the fire before going to bed or leaving the house.
- Soak hot ashes in water and place them in a metal container outside your home.

Protecting your home's exterior

- Stack firewood at least 30 feet away from your home.
- Keep the roof clear of debris like leaves and pine needles.
- Cover chimney top with a mesh screen spark arrester.
- Remove branches hanging above chimney, flues or vents.

Protecting your home's interior

- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home. Test them monthly and change batteries at least once a year.
- Consider installing the new long-life smoke alarms.
- Provide proper venting for all heating equipment.
- Extend vent pipes at least three feet above the roof.

Source: U.S. Fire Administration

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