

Fireplace and wood stove safety

The crackling of a fire in fireplace or woodstove is the best medicine for cheering the mood on a cold winter day. Here are a few common sense precautions to ensure that 'home fires' are safe through the winter season.

As a basic safety measure, it is important to keep your chimney and wood stove in good working order, and that means having them inspected and cleaned every year by a certified professional.

Chimneys should be free of obstructions and cracks, while wood stoves should be examined for cracks and legs, hinges and door seals should be checked for smooth joints and seams.

Make sure the damper is open before starting the fire, and keep the fire towards the back of the firebox on grates.

Also, since all fireplaces can generate carbon monoxide, be sure to install and use a carbon monoxide alarm.

Burn only seasoned hardwood – soft, moist wood speeds up creosote buildup – and never flammable liquids. Use only dry, seasoned wood pellets in pellet stoves.

Do not burn cardboard, trash or debris in your fireplace or wood stove.

To cut down on the fire hazard, keep the hearth area free of decorations and flammable materials, and use only fire-resistant materials on nearby walls around wood stoves. Also, avoid wearing loose-fitting clothing near the flames. Long hair should be tied back if you are 'tending' the fire.

The fireplace screen should be heavy enough to block rolling logs and span the whole opening to catch flying sparks and embers.

A fire should never be left unattended. Carefully extinguish the flames before going to bed or leaving the house.

Douse and saturate the ashes with water and give them time to completely cool before putting them in a metal container with a tight-fitting lid. The container should be stored at least 10 feet away from the house or other buildings.

Finally, if in spite of all your safety precautions, a fire does occur in your home, working smoke detectors and an escape plan will significantly increase your family's chances of surviving. Smoke detectors should have batteries checked regularly and installed at every level of your home. A home fire extinguisher available, with family members trained in its proper use is a good plan.

Please feel free to stop by or contact me if I can be of assistance.

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