

Fireplace Safety

Nestling on the couch in front of a cozy fire are delightful escapes from those cold wintery nights. According to the National Fire Protection Association, 30% of home heating fires are caused from chimneys. Before cozying up listening to the crackles of the fire, take a moment to read this safety information sheet.



- Schedule a chimney inspection annually by a professional for blockages and soundness. Blockages prohibit smoke from escaping and can cause chimney fires. If the chimney is used on a regular basis, the amount of buildup will be greater. This annual inspection will inform you if your chimney needs immediate cleaning or repairs. If the inspection shows the chimney needing repairs, make sure to repair the chimney before lighting any fires.
- Be sure to keep a fire extinguisher nearby and never leave the fireplace unattended, especially if children are present.
- Make sure all smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are working properly. Test the detectors often and change the batteries at least once a year.
- The area surrounding the fireplace should be clear of anything that is potentially flammable. These items include, but are not limited to, books, newspapers, furniture, holiday décor, and drapery. These items easily catch fire near a fireplace.
- Make sure to clean out remnants from previous fires. The bottom of the fireplace should not have more than 1 inch of ash. If this is not done, it restricts air supply to the wood, which causes more smoke.
- Make sure the damper/flue is open before lighting a fire. This will draw smoke up the chimney and out of the house. Shine a flashlight up the chimney to double check the damper is open. Be sure not to close the damper until every ember has stopped burning completely. This will avert the build-up of poisonous gases, especially when your family is sleeping.
- Be sure to use dry or older wood, dry wood burns more evenly. Damp and green wood causes buildup in your chimney and emits more smoke.
- Do not overload the fireplace. Smaller pieces of wood produce less smoke when placed directly on the grate. Large fires cause the chimney wall and roof materials to overheat, increasing the risk of fire.
- Never add an artificial log to a natural wood fire. Artificial logs are usually made of sawdust and wax which have special burning properties. If using artificial logs, be sure to read the package instructions carefully. Do not poke artificial logs. This may cause a flare-up, or the flaming wax could stick on the fireplace tool and drop onto the floor or carpet.
- Do not use coal or charcoal in a fireplace, or burn trash or wrappings. Using these could generate deadly fumes and/or ignite the roof from flying embers.
- Never use gasoline, charcoal lighter, or any other fuels to light or relight a fire. The vapors emitted could explode or cause flare-ups.
- Always use a screen around the fireplace. The screen aids to prevent sparks from flying.
- Always keep your children a safe distance from the fireplace. Before leaving the house or going to bed, make sure the fire is completely extinguished.