

HEATING SAFETY TIPS

By Marge Padgitt

GAS FURNACE HEATING:

Every year, many people become ill or die due to a back up of Carbon Monoxide gasses from the furnace or hot water heater flue or connecting pipes. This can be avoided with regular maintenance of the chimney.

- Have the furnace flue checked annually by a CSIA Certified Chimney Sweep (www.csia.org) to be sure it is not clogged or damaged, and that there is no Carbon Monoxide backup into the home.
- Make sure the flue is sized correctly to the appliances so it will draft well. Flues that are too large cause excessive condensation and damage the flue walls and mortar joints.
- Keep trash and storage containers at least 3' away from the heating system.
- Have a heavy duty stainless steel chimney cover installed to keep damaging rain, animals, and debris out of the chimney.
- Have the furnace checked annually by a qualified HVAC technician to be sure everything in the furnace is clean and in good working order.
- Only have a trained technician do needed repairs.

ABOUT CARBON MONOXIDE:

CO is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas that is the natural by-product of combustion. It is called the "Silent Killer," because the victims may not know they are being poisoned. Your body absorbs CO more easily than Oxygen, and mistakes it for Oxygen, causing illness and sometimes death. Even low levels of CO have been shown to cause irreversible brain damage.

Some Symptoms of CO poisoning are:

Dizziness, headaches

Unexplained Flu-like symptoms

Fainting, nausea

Death

Get to a hospital as soon as exposure to CO is known so proper treatment can be administered.

Source: The Midwest Chimney Safety Council

www.midwestcsc.org

TIPS FOR USING WOOD-BURNING STOVES, FIREPLACES, & FURNACES:

Most fires in wood stoves, fireplaces, and chimneys occur because of a lack of regular cleaning to remove creosote, which is the residue left behind by unburned fuel (ALL fuel burns incompletely). The National Fire Protection Association recommends annual inspection and cleaning as necessary by a Certified Chimney Sweep.

- Don't burn treated wood, railroad ties, trash, or colored paper since they emit toxic fumes.
- Don't burn pine trees or railroad ties since they create excessive amounts of flammable creosote and may overheat and warp your steel or cast iron appliance. Burning Hedge is also discouraged since it burns very hot.
- The best wood to burn is oak. It is very dense and burns slowly. However, soft woods may also be used – you'll just have to load the stove more often.
- Burn your stove hot (400-700 degrees) to assure complete combustion, which is how the stove is designed to be used, and it is cleaner and better for the environment. After establishing the

fire, you should see white or clear smoke coming out of the chimney. If the smoke is grey or black, something is wrong with the wood, your burning methods, or with the system.

- Have the chimney checked annually (every 2 months during the heating season if used for the primary source of heat) and cleaned as necessary by a professional CSIA Certified Chimney Sweep (www.csia.org). The sweep will remove flammable creosote, bird nests, and dead animals, and look for holes and gaps between the flue liner sections, cracked flue tiles, unparged or damaged smoke chamber, correct construction of the chimney, clearances to combustibles, and more that most homeowners do not have the training to indentify.
- Follow operating instructions by the manufacturer (if applicable) to assure safe and efficient heating.
- Keep combustible materials (including furniture) at least 3' away from the appliance.
- A screen should be placed in front of open fireplaces to keep embers and sparks from popping out.
- Place a child guard screen around stoves to keep children from getting burned.
- Never use flammable liquids to start a fire—the fumes can ignite and explode. Use an approved gel, fatwood, or firestarter.
- Remove flammable materials such as stockings from the mantel before starting a fire.
- Use a metal container to transport ashes to the exterior of the home.
- Do not build large fires or long-burning fires in open fireplaces. Fireplaces are designed for small, ambient fires only, and are not heating devices. If you want to make your fireplace energy efficient and a heating source, have a wood or gas fireplace insert installed by a professional.
- Have a heavy duty stainless steel chimney cover installed to keep damaging rain, animals, and debris out of the chimney.
- If you suddenly notice that draft stops while burning a stove, a chimney fire may have occurred which makes creosote expand to many times its size and chokes off the flue.
- If a chimney fire occurs, close the damper (if possible, get out of the house, and call the fire department. DO NOT use the chimney until it has been inspected by a Certified Chimney Sweep.

HOW TO FIND A QUALIFIED CHIMNEY SWEEP

Like any other type of contractor, there are good and bad chimney sweeps. You can greatly improve your chances of finding a qualified sweep if you follow these simple guidelines:

- Look for a CSIA Certified Chimney Sweep at www.csia.org. A Certified Sweep has taken classes and testing on the methods and tools necessary to do the job correctly and knows the codes and clearances to combustibles. He/she also has training in inspecting fireplaces and chimneys and will likely have the equipment necessary to do the job right.
- Check your local Better Business Bureau for any complaints or unresolved issues the company may have..
- If having repair work done, ask for references and samples of the company's work to review.
- Ask to see certificates of insurance for Worker's Comp and Liability. If the sweep is not insured, don't allow them on your property because you could be liable for any damages to your home or injuries to the sweep.
- Be sure to check out the company's website – there is likely a lot of information there for you to review.
- If anything about the company makes you wary, don't do business with them.

- Other sites to visit are the Midwest Chimney Safety Council at www.mcsc-net.org and the National Fireplace Institute at www.nficertified.org.

OTHER TIPS:

Install a digital CO detector on each level of your home.

Install a hard-wired fire alarm system with an alarm on each floor and in the attic next to the chimney.

Do not leave open fires unattended.