



CHECK OUT YOUR FIREPLACE

Most people enjoy sitting in front of a cozy fire on a wintry evening. If you are lucky enough to have a fireplace in your home, it's important to make sure everything is in working order before building that first fire of the season.

This is usually a job for a chimney sweep. Fireplaces should be cleaned every two years, because as little as 1/8" of creosote (produced when wood is burned) can cause a chimney fire. Soot and creosote can cause respiratory problems, too. Clogged flues and other venting problems can cause a deadly build-up of carbon monoxide in the home.

In addition to removing creosote and other residue from the inside of the chimney, a reputable sweep should look at other safety issues:

- Check the condition of both the flue and the firebox to make sure that mortar is not missing from the joints.
- Check for obstructions in the chimney (birds' nests, dead animals, and other things blocking the flue.)
- Check that the damper is working properly. (On a wood-burning fireplace, close the damper when no fire is burning; on a gas fireplace, leave the damper open all the time.)
- Make sure the ashpit door seals completely.

In addition to conventional fireplaces, sweeps will also clean gas-burning fireplaces and fireplaces with wood-burning inserts. They may suggest a chimney cap, to keep animals from taking up residence in your chimney and prevent moisture from entering. (Water that drips down your chimney can combine with built-up creosote to produce acids, and with ashes at the bottom of the chimney to produce lye, both of which can cause expensive repairs.)

Even after your chimney has been professionally cleaned and checked, remain safety-conscious when you use your fireplace. NEVER leave a fire unattended. Use screens or doors to prevent sparks from igniting materials nearby. Finally, make sure you have a working smoke detector and fire extinguisher on each floor of your home.