

Why chimneys must be cleaned

HOW OFTEN should a fireplace chimney be cleaned? Why do they need cleaning?

A. When wood burns, it gives off volatile gases. These gases cool and condense as they travel up the chimney, forming creosote.

With subsequent use, the creosote is reheated and can ignite, causing a fire up inside the chimney. In 1978 some 40,000 chimney fires in the U.S. caused \$23 million in damage.

A chimney fire that burns at up to 3,000 degrees can melt the mortar between bricks or send flaming meteorites out over the roof and yard, settling fire wherever they land.

CREOSOTE build-up varies with the type of burner used, type of wood burned and how the fireplace or



consumer mailbag

Terry Gibb

stove is operated.

Woodburning stoves, because of their high energy efficiency, form a quicker build-up than traditional fireplaces.

Soft wood, such as pine or cedar, produce more creosote than hardwoods, like oak or birch.

Slower burning fires result in more creosote. Build-up can be reduced by operating your fireplace at high volume for a short time at the beginning and end of use.

CHIMNEY FLUES should be inspected annually. The chimney needs cleaning if bricks appear black or "furry."

The rules of thumb are: annual cleaning for frequently used (4-5 times weekly); one cleaning every three to five years for occasionally used (1-2 times a month) fireplaces or wood stoves.

Chimneys can be cleaned either professionally (check your local Yellow Pages) or by renting the equipment and doing it yourself.

Creosote cannot be cleaned away by the powder products on the market. These products contain aluminum sulfate that is of little use against creosote and may corrode metal chimneys and cause a fire hazard itself.

CHIMNEY CLEANING is not hard - just messy. It can be done by one person in about three hours.

A cool day (40 degrees) is the best time to clean because the draft will be pulled up the chimney and reduce the dust from the opening into the room.

Basically, chimneys are cleaned by pushing a snag-fitting wire brush up and down the chimney flue until all the creosote has been brushed off the bricks and the brush remains clean. This can be done from the firebox or the roof. However, if it's done from the roof, less dust will drift into the room.

After the dust has settled into the firebox, a metal hand brush is used to scrub the walls inside the firebox

and up into the flue. The damper and smoke shelf should also be dusted free of creosote ash.

Rather than vacuuming up the creosote, you might want to sweep it up and save it. Creosote makes an excellent garden fertilizer.

Always wear goggles and a face mask during chimney cleaning.

ECO-TIP: EMEAC, the East Michigan Environmental Action Council, is again selling its holiday cards on recycled paper. They have two pen and ink designs: a chickadee on a green pine bow and a racoon playing with a red-ribboned Christmas package. These cute cards are \$4 per dozen (33 of which is tax-deductible).

You can get them by sending a check to EMEAC, 21220 W. 14 Mile, Birmingham, 48010.

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Faulty heaters cause home fires

More home fires occur during winter months than any other time of year.

Proper space heater use and maintenance can reduce fires, according to the Oakland County Emergency Medical Services and Disaster Control office.

"If residents using space heaters would take just a few minutes to learn how to properly operate and maintain space heaters, some tragic and sometimes deadly home fires may be avoided," said Paul Phelps, manager of Oakland County EMS/Disaster Control.

EMS OFFERS these tips to residents using space heaters to help heat their homes this winter:

• Be sure your space heater is in good working condition. They need frequent checkups and cleaning. A dirty or neglected space heater is a critical fire hazard.

• Maintain adequate clearance in all directions around your space heater. Surrounding surfaces should not be too hot to touch with your bare hand.

• Keep all combustibles away from the space heater, such as clothes, curtains, beds or furniture.

• Be sure your electrical wiring is adequate and avoid overloading circuits.

• Never use space heaters in the bathroom or in wet areas, and never touch one when you are wet.

• Keep children away from space heaters at all times.

• Use only safety listed equipment. Electric space heaters should have the UL label.

Waiver exam set by OU

Waiver exams for the Accounting Assistant Diploma Program, offered by the Division of Continuing Education at Oakland University, will be conducted at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 13, on campus near Rochester.

Advance registration and payment of \$10 per exam are required. To register, call 370-3120, between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. weekdays.

The waiver exams allow enrollees sufficiently experienced in accounting to be excused from taking two courses in principles of practical accounting required in the 15-month Accounting Assistant paraprofessional program which begins Jan. 19.

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