

AROUND THE HOUSE

Be sure your chimney stacks up

A developer was near completion on a new 76-home development in suburban Philadelphia. A local home inspector was brought in to review one of the properties for a client.

The inspector noticed that the fireplace chimney on the home he was inspecting wasn't the proper height. He noted this in the report.

Before he got into his vehicle to leave for the next inspection, he took notice of the other new homes in the development. Each had similar chimneys, none of which was the proper height. All 75 homes had similar problems and, subsequently, all the chimneys had to be changed.

Not all chimneys are created equal. There are accepted standards for chimneys, although some of these standards vary based on geographic location and local ordinances. Many chimneys are lacking in one or more of these standards.

■ How high your chimney should be: Your chimney should be at least two feet above any portion of the building within 10 feet of the chimney and at least three feet above the point where it passes through the roof.

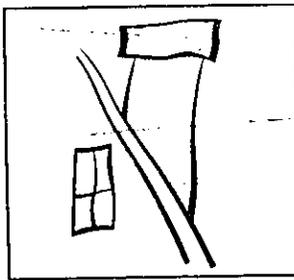
■ What size flue the chimney should have: Your chimney shouldn't be smaller than the collar from the heating appliance.

■ How far the chimney should be from combustible material: The chimney should be two inches away if it is built partially or entirely within the structure, and one inch if it is built outside the structure.

■ Height requirements for metal chimneys: The height requirements for metal chimneys are the same as for masonry chimneys: at least two feet above any portion of the building within 10 feet of the chimney, and at least three feet above the point where it passes through the roof.

■ How to know your fireplace will draw without lighting a fire: Generally, you can know if your fireplace will draw without lighting a fire by checking just a few things:

- 1. Check for smoke stains on the front of the fireplace or mantel. These stains indicate that something has gone



wrong. What that is will be determined later, but there is a problem if stains are present. However, if a fireplace is new or if the mantel has been recently painted, the stains may not be evident.

- 2. Check the size of the flue and firebox opening.

2a. The chimney flue should be one-tenth (if square or rectangle) to one-twelfth (if round) the size of the firebox opening or larger.

For example, an eight-by-12-inch chimney flue, or 96 square inches, should have a firebox opening of 960 square inches, about 30 by 32 inches.

2b. The chimney should be two feet above the roof or any roof structure within 10 feet and a minimum of three feet above the roof.

2c. Other criteria such as the throat and smoke shelf should be considered. However, if the flue to the firebox ratio is correct and the chimney height is acceptable, the chimney will probably draw.

Many chimneys need some form of repair or cleaning. Consult a chimney specialist from a recognized chimney association for an annual cleaning and safety review.

Around the House, by the AmeriSpec home inspection service of Plymouth, instructs homeowners about the basics of home maintenance and repair. If you have a question, write to: Around the House/At Home, The Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.

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