



## How to enjoy your fireplace safely

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If you're like many owners of luxury homes, you love curling up in front of a crackling fire on a chilly evening. But have you given your fireplace any attention lately? Whether yours is wood-burning or gas, you'll want to follow these important guidelines to keep it operating efficiently and safely.

### Regular inspections are important

If you burn wood in your fireplace, the resulting smoke contains creosote, which is essentially a tar that builds up on the inside of your chimney. Creosote is highly flammable and can lead to chimney fires. According to the latest statistics available, between 2012 and 2014, there were an average of 22,300 chimney-related fires in the U.S. that resulted in \$23.7 million in property loss.<sup>1</sup>

The National Fire Protection Association recommends an annual inspection of chimneys, fireplaces and vents, followed by any necessary cleaning, maintenance work or repairs. You should follow this national standard even if you don't use your chimney much, as animals may build nests in the flue, or there may be other types of deterioration that could make the chimney unsafe to use.<sup>2</sup>

If your fireplace burns gas, don't assume it doesn't need care and attention, too. Maintenance on your chimney decreases the chance for chimney cap damage and severe smoke or carbon monoxide inhalation. Chimney caps keep out corrosive rainwater and nest-building animals; damaged caps can invite both inside. As for carbon monoxide poisoning, that can be the result of a blocked or poorly vented fireplace. (Please take this as a reminder to make sure you have carbon monoxide detectors and that they're in working order.)<sup>1</sup>

When it's time to call a chimney service, choose one that's certified by the Chimney Safety Institute of America, because you want professionals who are knowledgeable about building codes, trained to recognize deterioration or venting problems, and able to advise you regarding the chimney's condition.<sup>3</sup>

## Ever heard of “chimney sweeping logs”?

You can purchase packaged “logs” that contain a specially formulated powder that, when heated by the fire, converts to a penetrating gas that breaks down creosote compounds in your chimney. They’re popular because they’re convenient, and manufacturers claim they can reduce creosote by up to 60%. But here’s a caveat: The Washington Public Fire Educators Association says, “The use of chimney sweeping logs (and similar products) alone is not an adequate substitute for mechanical chimney cleaning and inspection because it does not provide for the same level of protection to the chimney system.” The bottom line: While creosote-busting logs may help you maintain your chimney between professional cleanings, they do not replace the need for regular chimney maintenance.<sup>4</sup>

## Everyday safety for wood-burning fireplaces

Keep the following advice in mind each time you enjoy your fireplace to maintain peak performance and maximum safety:

- Don’t let ashes gather in the firebox. Clean them out as they accumulate.
- Burn only seasoned firewood in your fireplace. Check with your firewood vendor to make sure that’s what you’re getting.
- Ensure the damper is entirely open BEFORE lighting a fire in the firebox.
- Do not burn pressure-treated or painted wood in the fireplace. This will hasten creosote buildup (pressure-treated wood) or potentially create toxic fumes (painted wood) that are dangerous to you and your family members.
- Put the largest logs on the bottom of the firebox, followed by smaller logs on top. Why? The fire will burn hotter and produce less smoke. Top that pile with kindling (around one inch) and crushed newspaper to get the fire started properly. This method will inhibit residue buildup in your chimney.<sup>4</sup>

## One last tip:

You’ll save money and avoid a long wait by scheduling your chimney inspection and fireplace cleaning in the spring.<sup>3</sup> At the very least, plan to cross fireplace maintenance off your to-do list well before cool weather appears in the fall, so you’re not tempted to light a fire before your fireplace is 100% ready to go.

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<sup>1</sup> “Quick Q: Do I Really Need To Clean My Fireplace?,” Brigitt Earley, [apartmenttherapy.com/fireplace-cleaning-safety-36664957](https://apartmenttherapy.com/fireplace-cleaning-safety-36664957) (Nov. 9, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Chimney Safety Institute of America, [csia.org/faq.html](https://csia.org/faq.html) (accessed Sept. 14, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> “Fireplace Cleaning: When to Clean a Chimney Flue,” Matt Boley, [familyhandyman.com/article/when-to-clean-a-chimney-flue/#:~:text=A%20fireplace%20cleaning%20log%20helps,is%20vital%20to%20your%20safety](https://familyhandyman.com/article/when-to-clean-a-chimney-flue/#:~:text=A%20fireplace%20cleaning%20log%20helps,is%20vital%20to%20your%20safety). (Dec. 30, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> “Why Fireplace Safety and Cleaning Your Chimney Matter,” [petro.com/resource-center/why-and-how-to-clean-your-chimney](https://petro.com/resource-center/why-and-how-to-clean-your-chimney) (accessed Sept. 14, 2020).