

Before Using Your Fireplace, Consider These Safety Tips From Chief Jordan

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With the arrival of cooler weather, we understand the urge to light up your fireplaces. Please remember before doing so make sure that the chimney and flue have been cleaned and inspected to ensure they're ready for safe use. The Department of Public Safety responds to numerous incidents related to chimney fires each year, and most can be prevented with proper cleaning, inspections and proper fireplace usage.

Annually, over 25,000 chimney fires that cause more than \$125 million in property loss are reported across the U.S. Chimney fires occur in most cases due to creosote buildup in the chimney flue. Creosote is a byproduct of woodburning, and it tends to line the chimney flue. Wood choice is a major factor in the amount of creosote buildup. Properly seasoned hardwoods produce much less creosote than softer wood, such as pine. Only hardwood is recommended for fireplace use.

Creosote is extremely flammable and when ignited in a chimney flue can burn as hot as 1,100 degrees, which is much higher than the temperatures that chimney flues are designed to withstand. A creosote fire in the flue pipe can cause the flue pipe to warp or fail. This can lead to the fire traveling outside the pipe into other areas of the home, such as the attic.

Be sure to prepare for chimney season by doing the following:

- Ensure the chimney and fireplace are cleaned and inspected annually at least once a year – more often if the fireplaces are utilized more frequently. Your chimney inspector can recommend an inspection/cleaning schedule for the usage of your fireplace.
- Only properly seasoned hardwood should be used in the fireplace.
- Do not leave a fireplace unattended. Only use a fireplace when it can be supervised.
- Keep the flames low. To prevent the flames from reaching any potential creosote build-up, the fire should be contained within the fireplace box. Only smoke and heated gas should enter the flue pipe.
- Use a metal container for ash removal and pour water over the ashes before dumping to insure everything is completely extinguished. Many fires occur due to improper disposal of fireplace ash.
- If you suspect your fireplace is malfunctioning or your chimney is on fire, evacuate the home and call 911 immediately. The potential for a chimney fire to spread into other areas of the home is significant. The best response is to call the professionals who can ensure the fire is out and inspect for further damage.