

Fourth Quarter | November 2010

Burning wood safely

With fall in full force and cooler temperatures just around the corner, many homeowners may be thinking of lighting their fireplace or woodstove for warmth and a cozy atmosphere. But before you light that first match, there are steps to take to ensure your family and home are safe from the risk of a fire.

“Just like your car and home, your fireplace, woodstove and chimney need regular maintenance,” said Rick Barks, Assistant Vice-President of Personal Lines at SGI CANADA. “You should have a qualified professional check them before you start using them for the season.”

The qualification to look for is Wood Energy Technology Transfer (W.E.T.T.) certified. These technicians have certificates denoting specialized training and expertise. To find a W.E.T.T. certified technician in your area, visit their website at www.wettinc.ca.

According to Barks, if you burn one cord of wood per year/season, the suggested safe practice is to have your chimney swept and inspected annually by a qualified technician.

If you have purchased a home with a wood burning appliance and don't know the condition of the appliance or chimney, or if you've never had your chimney cleaned, do not operate it until you have it inspected and cleaned by a qualified technician and declared safe to use.

Cleaning your chimney is necessary to prevent a build-up of creosote. Creosote is an oily fluid released from wood tar in the burning process that can cause chimney fires which often reach over 1,000 degrees C. As little as one eighth of an inch of creosote in your chimney can result in a severe and devastating fire.

“Chimneys are the most important part of the heating system, yet they're also the most neglected,” said Barks.

If you have an older factory built (metal) chimney, also known as a Class “A” vent chimney, your home and family could be at risk. First developed in the 1950s, these chimneys were not built and insulated to withstand the temperatures generated by today's airtight stoves and high efficiency wood burning appliances. Factory built chimneys must now meet certain safety standards set out by the National Building Code of Canada. If your

chimney has a CAN/ULC S 629M certification label attached to it, it meets these standards. If it doesn't, consult a qualified technician, usually available at businesses marketing these types of products.

In addition to having your chimney and fireplace inspected and maintained by a qualified technician, Barks recommends the following tips to help keep your family and home safe from fire:

- Check with a qualified technician if your chimney is more than 25 years old. Most modern chimneys come with a 25-year manufacturer's warranty. If your chimney is older than that, it may need to be replaced.
- Burn only dry, clean and untreated wood. Freshly cut or damp wood burns poorly and contributes greatly to creosote build-up in your chimney.
- Ensure that an adequate supply of fresh air is entering your home when your stove or fireplace is operating. Opening a window a crack will help prevent smoke from back drafting into your home and ensure a good draft up the chimney.

- Keep furniture, firewood and other combustible materials a safe distance away from the heating appliance.
- Remove ashes and place them in a covered metal container, stored outside
- and away from your deck or other combustible material.

Fire is devastating to those who experience it. Fire destroys lives, personal property and irreplaceable objects. Please be careful and ensure your chimney, fireplace and woodstove are properly inspected and maintained before you enjoy them this season.

For more information on protecting your home, contact your insurance broker annually to ensure your policies are accurate, up-to-date and provide the coverage your family needs. For more information on loss prevention, visit the Safety Tips section on SGI CANADA's website at www.sgicanada.ca.

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