

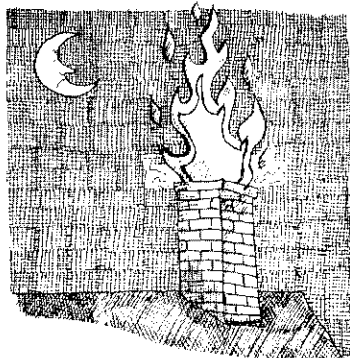
Why Should You Call A Chimney Sweep?

By Jim Gillam

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Why should you call a chimney sweep? What is the purpose of getting your chimney swept, really?

Norman Lenz, with over sixty years experience as a chimney sweep in Canada and Germany, has the answer: "To prevent fires, to save energy and to help prevent pollution."



"And **TO SAVE LIVES,**" adds Sandra Mitchell, Honorary Life President of the National Association of Chimney Sweeps in the United Kingdom.

Prevent Fires

When you burn a fire in your fireplace or woodstove, smoke is created. Smoke actually contains droplets of unburned carbon material from your firewood, and some of these droplets condense on the inner walls of the flue, forming creosote. These deposits can easily ignite – a slightly hotter fire than normal or newspapers flaming up to the damper could be enough.

Once kindled, creosote burns with an intense fire at temperatures above 2000°F. Creosote burning inside a chimney is known as a "flue fire" or "chimney fire." Flaming balls of debris may be lifted out of your chimney onto your roof, your lawn, or your next door neighbor's house. Structural materials in your house near the chimney, such as wood framing or paper-coated gypsum board, may be exposed to extremely high temperatures. Your chimney may be weakened so that it is unusable, or the house itself could catch fire.

On the other hand, creosote deposits can build up to the point where the flue is severely restricted. It may be difficult to light a fire or keep it going. Smoke or noxious fumes may spill out into your living area.

Professional chimney sweeps remove these creosote deposits from the chimney, opening the passageway for smoke and reducing the potential for an uncontrolled flue fire.

People who heat with wood are less likely to have a flue fire if they hire professional chimney sweeps than if they clean their own chimneys, a nationwide study showed.

Save Energy

Keeping your heating system clean helps it operate more efficiently, and helps you get the most for your energy dollars. "Creosote can act as a thermal insulator," according to Jay Shelton (*Solid Fuels Encyclopedia*). "Deposits inside a stove, connector, or interior exposed chimney can reduce heat transfer, which lowers the overall efficiency of the system."

Help Prevent Pollution

Operating your combustion appliance most efficiently, whether it is a woodstove, fireplace, pellet stove or furnace, helps reduce the amount of smoke it will generate. The services of a competent chimney professional can help you attain that goal.

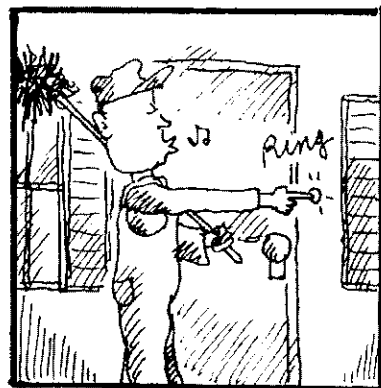
Air pollution from woodstoves and fireplaces has been a problem in some areas, so a maximum level of particulate emissions is enforced for new woodstoves on the market. Before any stove model can be sold, manufacturers must submit a sample for testing under controlled conditions in an emissions laboratory. If the stove model doesn't smoke too much it is then "certified" by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This has been the law in the United States since 1990.

Regular maintenance, including chimney sweeping, is important to keep certified stoves and other heating appliances operating at peak efficiency. Stoves serviced regularly by a chimney sweep averaged 65% less smoke than other stoves in a study where EPA-certified woodstoves were tested for emissions after many years of real world household use.

Save Lives

Every winter, we hear or read about needless tragedies occurring when people are poisoned by carbon monoxide due to blocked or faulty flues. Not reported, of course, are the countless times when such tragedies are prevented by timely inspection and cleaning and/or repair. Your chimney professional can probably tell you, with justifiable pride, of instances where he or she has saved a family from disaster by getting called just in time.

Are you sure *your* combustion systems are in suitable condition?



Finding a Capable Chimney Professional

Because proper chimney maintenance can help protect people from the dangers of house fires and carbon monoxide poisonings, it is important to choose your chimney professional wisely. Before you hire a chimney sweep, find out whether chimney sweeps are required to have a license in the community where you live. If they do, then your first step is to verify that any companies you're considering have valid licenses.

Ask around in your community for a chimney sweep with a good reputation. A well-earned good reputation is the public's "seal of approval."



Chimney professionals also demonstrate their competency through certification by the Chimney Safety Institute of America (CSIA), the National Fireplace Institute (for installers of hearth appliances), the Wood Energy Technology Transfer program in Canada, and some state chimney sweep organizations. A list of CSIA Certified Chimney Sweeps is available at www.csia.org.