

# Chimney Fire Safety

## *Chimney maintenance for wood burning appliances.*

Chimney fires are one of the highest areas of origin for residential structure fires in Washington State. The Chimney Safety Institute of America reports that creosote accumulation is the leading cause of chimney fires. A chimney that is dirty, blocked or is in disrepair can inhibit proper venting of smoke up the flue and can also cause a chimney fire. Nearly all residential fires originating in the chimney are preventable. An annual chimney inspection by a certified chimney sweep can prevent fire or carbon monoxide poisoning. To keep your home safe from chimney fires follow these guidelines.

### **1 Maintenance** – a very important step in preventing chimney fires!

- Have your chimney checked every year by a qualified chimney professional.
- Burn only well seasoned hardwoods.
- Install a chimney cap.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector.
- Have your chimney sweep ensure that your chimney has an appropriate liner.
- Following a violent storm, earthquake, flood or lightning strike, have your chimney inspected for damage—inside and out.

### **2 Prevention** – Remember prevention is your best defense against fire.

- If you have a wood or coal stove, be sure it is installed at least 36 inches away from the wall. Keep combustible materials well away from the stove and chimney connector. Place an approved stove board under the unit to protect the floor from heat and hot coals which might drop out.
- Keep matches and lighters out of reach of children!** - Store matches and lighter out of the sight and reach of children.

### **3 Be Prepared**—Know what to do in Case of Fire. If you have a chimney fire, evacuate your home and call 9-1-1

- Residential Fire Sprinklers** – Offer the best protection to ensure escape from the fire. Consider installing them in your home.
- Install Smoke Alarms** – on every level of your home and outside sleeping areas.
- Make and Practice a Home Escape Plan** – Make an emergency escape plan with your family. Be sure to have two ways out of every room. Decide on a designated meeting place outside. Then hold a fire drill and practice your plan annually.
- Get Out and Stay Out** -- Go directly to your planned meeting place and stay there. If you think someone is trapped inside, notify the fire department.
- Crawl Low in Smoke.** – If you are trapped in smoke, get down on your hands and knees and crawl to the nearest safe way out. Smoke and toxic fumes rise, so cleaner air is near the floor.
- Stop, Drop and Roll** -- If your clothes catch on fire, do not run, stop where you are, drop to the ground, and roll over and over to smother the flames.

*References:* Chimney Safety Institute of America 1602 Industrial Drive, Suite 8; Gaithersburg, MD 20877; 1-800-536-0118; on line at <http://www.csia.org>. Heat Without Getting Burned pamphlet, National Fire Protection Association; 1 Batterymarch Park, Quincy MA 02269-910; 1-800-344-3555 [www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org); Washington Public Fire Educators position paper on Chimney Cleaning Devices and Products. [www.wsafc.org](http://www.wsafc.org)