

Fireplace Safety **By Basil Housewright**

On a chilly evening, a fireplace is always a welcoming sight for guests and family. However, leaving a fire unattended even for a few moments or not properly maintaining your fireplace can have devastating consequences. Numerous home fires are started each year due to unsafe fireplace operations or lack of proper maintenance.

SAFETY TIPS FOR ANY TYPE OF FIREPLACE

Have your new fireplace installed by a certified, insured professional installer.

Make sure your home is equipped with smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

Check each regularly to make sure they are in working condition and have necessary batteries. An easy way to remember to do this is make it part of your routine when you adjust the clocks each year for Daylight Savings Time.

Each level of your home should be equipped with detectors, and there should be detectors located inside or near sleeping areas.

Equip your home with a fire extinguisher -- and learn how to use it before you need it!

Keep flammable materials three feet away from the fire and heat source.

Never burn anything in a fireplace that the manufacturer hasn't approved. Never, ever burn plastic or Styrofoam.

Never leave a fire unattended.

Keep small children and pets away from the fireplace. Consider using a physical barrier, such as a gate, to keep children at a distance.

Check to be sure that the fire is completely out or gas/electric appliances have been turned off before you leave your house or go to sleep.

Read and follow the manufacturer's safety and maintenance instructions for your particular fireplace.

Have your chimney inspected by a licensed chimney sweep each year, to be sure it is free of debris and safe to use

GAS FIREPLACE SAFETY TIPS

After you turn off your gas fireplace, allow enough time for glass panels and metal framing to cool before letting anyone touch it.

Make sure children and guests are aware that the glass panels will get hot.

If there are children frequently in your home, you should have a switch lock installed so that they can't turn on a gas fireplace by themselves.

Gas fireplace remote controls should be kept out of a child's reach.

Follow manufacturer's recommended service schedule.

ELECTRIC FIREPLACE AND SPACE HEATERS SAFETY TIPS

Make sure you have the recommended distance between the fireplace or space heater and anything that is flammable.

Do not leave children or pets alone in a room with an electric fireplace or space heater.

Make sure your electric heater or fireplace has been safety tested before using.

Turn off electric heaters or fireplaces before going to sleep.

WOOD-BURNING FIREPLACE SAFETY

Burn only dry, well seasoned hardwoods in your fireplace. Buy your wood in the spring and store it off the ground and protected from excessive moisture. Green firewood should be seasoned well enough to burn in 6 months to 1 year.

Do not burn trash -- that can create a fire that is out of control and/or unleash dangerous poisons into your home.

Remember to fully open the damper before you start a fire.

Use glass doors or fireplace screens to keep burning embers inside the fireplace.

Have a chimney cap installed to keep debris and animals out of your chimney.

Never use flammable liquids, like gasoline, to start a fire.

Dispose of ashes carefully

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