



HOME BUILDERS ASSOCIATION
of Dayton

The heart of a home is the fireplace

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In a couple of short weeks, the holidays will be in full swing, and fireplaces across the nation will be glowing with warmth and light. Whether you're expecting a visit from jolly old fellow in the red suit or are just planning to spend a few cozy nights snuggled up in front of crackling flames; now is a good time to make sure that your fireplace and chimney are safe and operational throughout the holiday season.

The first step to ensuring safety and comfort is a thorough chimney cleaning. In order to vent safely, chimney flues must be clean, unblocked and intact. Flammable residue in the flues can lead to fires in the chimney, and cracks or gaps in the flue can decrease the draft required both for combustion and to carry toxic gases away from your home.

A chimney cleaning should include the removal of accumulated (and highly flammable) creosote, a natural byproduct of burning wood and wood products. Eliminating soot buildup is also paramount; in fact, as little as a quarter of an inch of soot can result in a significant difference in your chimney's performance. Finally, it's also important to clear the chimney of bird and animal nests, leaves and other debris that might block the flow of smoke and redirect it back in to your home. Small animals such as raccoons and squirrels often consider your chimney a very inviting place to build a home.

While it's possible for you to clean your own chimney, it's a messy and time-consuming job. Professional chimney cleaners, known as chimney sweeps, have the right tools to clean your chimney quickly and efficiently, and can also detect any needed repairs that a less experienced homeowner might miss.

When looking for someone to clean or repair your chimney, a quick checklist can help you identify the best professional for the job.

- Does he or she carry industry certification and belong to the National Chimney Sweep Guild? Ask to see proof of

certification, and check the expiration date. You can verify membership online at www.ncsg.org, or find a certified chimney sweep through the Chimney Safety Institute of America (www.csa.org).

- Does the company carry valid business liability insurance to protect your home and furnishings against accidents?
- How long has the company been in business? Is a list of references available? Don't hesitate to call previous clients to determine how satisfied they were with the service.
- Are there any unresolved complaints about the company with the Better Business Bureau or the city/state consumer protection agency?

After you've cleaned your chimney (or had it cleaned professionally), you may want to install a chimney cap. Chimney caps not only serve to keep out birds and small animals that try to nest in your chimney, but also help to prevent water penetration and any resulting damage. Caps also prevent sparks from flying out onto your roof or into surrounding greenery and potentially igniting a fire.

To keep your chimney as clean as possible throughout the season, select well-seasoned firewood. Non-seasoned (or green) wood tends to smoke and burn less efficiently, and can leave significantly more resin and soot in your chimney than wood that has been left to dry for at least 12 months.

Also, make sure to check your chimney damper to ensure that it seals tightly when it is closed. Otherwise, you may be allowing heated air from your home to seep out through the chimney when it is not in use.

What if you have a gas fireplace? Instead of traditional wood-burning fireplaces, many new homes are equipped with gas versions that provide the look and feel of a fire without the ongoing maintenance and cleanup.

While these units may seem maintenance-free, owners of gas fireplaces aren't entirely off the hook. If you own a gas fireplace, you should gear up for the winter by making sure the burner and pilot assemblies are clean.

When preparing to clean your gas fireplace, it's vital to turn off the pilot light before beginning your maintenance. Make sure the fireplace is cool—do not attempt maintenance while it is hot. Access the burner and pilot assembly by removing the log set, bricks, embers and other similar materials, and carefully use a vacuum attachment or soft bristle brush to sweep away any dust and debris. After replacing the log set and other materials as outlined in your operating manual, clean the front glass to remove any visible film. You also may want to consider an annual professional inspection and cleaning to ensure that your gas fireplace is functioning properly.