



Derbyshire  
Fire & Rescue Service  
Making Derbyshire Safer



# Safe Use

of Open **Fires**, Stoves  
and Maintaining Chimneys

[www.derbys-fire.gov.uk](http://www.derbys-fire.gov.uk)



## Open fires and stoves

If you have an open fire or stove, follow the advice in this leaflet to reduce the risk of becoming a fire statistic. If you are considering removing a gas fire or electric heater and having an open fire grate or stove installed always seek an approved fitter who will give the correct guidance.

An open fire or a stove might provide a focal point to a room and an alternative way of heating your home, but they can also bring an increased risk of a fire if they are not looked after properly and chimneys maintained.

The main points to remember if you have an open fire or stove are to:

- always use a spark guard to protect against sparks from hot embers, and if you have pets or young children consider using a safety guard
- make sure that the fire is out before going to bed at night or leaving the house

- keep chimneys and flues clean and well maintained – make sure your chimney is swept regularly
- make sure your chimney is swept according to the type of fuel used:
  - *smokeless fuels need to be done at least once a year*
  - *bituminous coal at least twice a year*
  - *wood quarterly when in use*
  - *oil once a year*
  - *gas once a year*
- never interrupt the air supply by blocking air vents or air bricks.

Always make sure that you have a working smoke alarm fitted to each floor of your house and test it weekly. They help save lives by giving you early warning of a fire and extra seconds to get out.

Make sure you have an escape plan in the event of a fire. If you have a fire, get out, stay out and call 999.



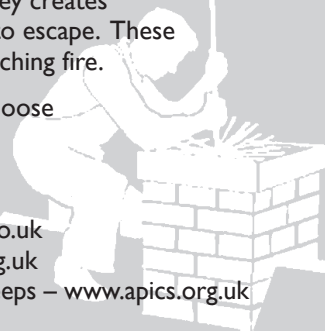
## Chimney sweeping

Sweeping your flue/chimney removes deposits which have built up due to the burning of carbon-based fuels, such as coal, wood, oil and gas. A clean chimney creates a clear and safe passage for gases caused by the burning process to escape. These gases are combustible and a clean chimney has a lower risk of catching fire.

Sweeping will also mean that objects such as nests, cobwebs and loose brickwork, which could obstruct the chimney, are removed.

For further technical information on chimney safety visit:

- the Guild of Master Sweeps – [www.guild-of-master-sweeps.co.uk](http://www.guild-of-master-sweeps.co.uk)
- the National Association of Chimney Sweeps – [www.nacs.org.uk](http://www.nacs.org.uk)
- the Association of Professional and Independent Chimney Sweeps – [www.apics.org.uk](http://www.apics.org.uk)





## Preventing chimney fires

There are four main reasons for chimney fires – infrequent sweeping and cleaning, burning unseasoned wet wood, improper appliance sizing and overnight burning or smouldering of wood for long periods in stoves.

To reduce the risk of a chimney fire, you should:

- sweep the chimney on a regular basis
- make sure all wood burnt has a moisture content of less than 17%
- choose the correct size appliance for your room – seek advice for this
- not overload the grate or appliance
- build smaller, hotter fires that burn completely and produce less smoke
- regularly have hot fires - once a day - this will help to dry out the tar that has built up
- always follow the manufacturer's recommendations on fuel loading and air flow if you have a stove

- never burn cardboard boxes or waste paper
- never use petrol or paraffin to light your fire
- consider the use of a chimney cleaner additive - a non zinc based additive that helps tar flake off the chimney
- make sure you store all fuel away from the open fire or stove.

Anyone who has an appliance with a flue has a responsibility to maintain them both. It is often stated that people should take reasonable care within the terms of household insurance policies and, in the case of thatched properties, the frequency of sweeping is often specified by the insurers.

If you are in a rented property, your landlord has a duty of care towards you as a tenant 'to repair and keep in working order, any room heater and water heating equipment'.

## Carbon Monoxide poisoning

Carbon Monoxide (CO) gas can kill. Heating and cooking appliances fuelled by coal, smokeless fuels, wood, oil and gas can cause CO poisoning if they are poorly installed, incorrectly used or if they are not properly and regularly maintained.

Early symptoms of CO poisoning include: tiredness, drowsiness, dizziness, chest pains, nausea and flu like symptoms.

You can reduce the risk of CO poisoning by:

- having appliances installed and properly checked by competent engineers
- getting chimneys and flues inspected and swept
- not overloading a fire and only burning the fuel it is designed for
- fitting a carbon monoxide detector
- good ventilation.



# How you will know you have a chimney fire?

All chimney fires are extremely dangerous – internal flue temperatures can reach 1,100 degrees Celsius. As a result, radiant heat is emitted through the chimney walls and a devastating house fire could start, especially if you have a thatched or wooden roof.

Signs and symptoms of a chimney fire:

- a loud roaring noise, the result of massive amounts of air being sucked through the burner or fireplace opening
- sparks and flames seen shooting from the chimney top, which can be similar to fireworks in appearance
- a glowing or shimmering outlet or connector
- a vibrating appliance, outlet or connector
- flames visible through any tiny cracks in the outlet or connector
- smoke or smells noticeable in adjoining rooms or the loft space
- chimney breast or flue heating up in either the same room or other rooms they pass through.

It is important to note that it is possible to experience a chimney fire without any of these characteristics so this should be treated as a guide.

## What to do if you have a chimney fire

1. Call the fire service - **999** if you are at all worried for your safety then **Get out and Stay out.**
2. If you have a stove then shut all air vents and flue dampers to reduce the chimney fire's oxygen supply.
3. Move flammable materials, furniture, ornaments away from the fireplace.
4. Feel the chimney breast throughout the house - if it is getting hot then move furniture away from it.
5. Do not pour water on the fire if you have a stove.
6. Do not pour salt on the fire - this can create chlorine gas which is damaging to the chimney and toxic if it gets into the room.
7. Make sure firefighters can access the loft space.

## After a chimney fire



After a chimney fire has been put out, the chimney must be inspected as soon as possible. A certified chimney sweep should carry out a thorough inspection before the chimney is used again to see if there has been any damage caused and any remedial work needed.