



Fireplace Safety Tips

Fireplaces continue to be an increasingly popular option in homes. It's important to ensure residents take precautions when choosing, installing, and maintaining a fireplace. More than 14,000 fires are started by fireplaces each year. Oftentimes, these fires escalate and cause a full-blown house fire resulting in injury and death. Causes may include: damaged fireplace with missing bricks, damaged flues, obstructed flues, ignition of nearby combustibles, sparks, overloaded firebox, or an improperly installed built-in metal fireplace.

Important Safety Tips

- Inspect the fireplace. Make sure it has adequate protective linings and smoke ducts. Ensure the chimney is clean and in good condition.
- If you are installing a factory-made fireplace, it should not be near combustible materials. It should also have adequate flame and heat barriers.



- Inspect chimneys annually, and clean as necessary, by a CSIA (Chimney Safety Institute of America) certified Chimney Sweep. This reduces the risk of fire and carbon monoxide poisonings due to creosote buildup or obstructions in the chimneys. To locate a certified sweep, visit the CSIA Web site at www.csia.org or call 1-800-536-0118. A certified sweep can also perform maintenance on your wood stove or help remove gas logs from a fireplace.

- Keep the top of chimneys clear of tree limbs or debris.
- Install a chimney cap to keep debris and animals out of the chimney.
- Always open the damper before lighting the fire and keep it open until the ashes are cool. This will avert the buildup of poisonous gases, such as carbon monoxide.
- Build it right. Place firewood or fire logs at the rear of the fireplace on a supporting grate. To start the fire, use a firelighter.
- Fuel the fire safely. For burning firewood in wood stoves or fireplaces, choose well-seasoned wood that has been dried for a minimum of six months to a year and stored properly.



- Never use gasoline, charcoal lighter or other fuel to light or relight a fire because the vapors can explode. Never keep flammable fuels near a fire. Vapors can travel the length of a room and explode.



- Do not use coal or charcoal in a fireplace because of the danger of carbon monoxide buildup. Do not burn trash or gift wrap in the fireplace because polystyrene foam and other coated materials can generate deadly fumes. Flying paper embers could also ignite the roof.
- Do not treat artificial logs like real logs. Artificial logs are usually made of sawdust and wax and have special burning properties. Be sure to read the instructions on the logs and follow them carefully.
- Be sure prefabricated metal fireplaces and chimneys are approved by the Underwriters' Laboratories (UL) and installed as specified by the instructions. Free-standing fireplaces should be at least three feet from unprotected walls, drapes, or other flammable materials. Use necessary wall protection to protect walls closer than three feet. Place a pad of brick or insulated fireproof material on the floor beneath the fireplace. Be sure that pipes connecting free-standing stoves and fireplaces to a chimney are at least No. 24 gauge steel, UL listed and installed in accordance with the listing.
- Use only enough fuel to keep the fire at the desired temperature. Avoid "roaring" fires. They can start chimney fire from soot and creosote deposits in the flue.
- Do not overload the fireplace. Large fires can lead to overheating of wall or roof materials, particularly if the fireplace is constructed of metal.



- Always use a screen around the fireplace to keep sparks from flying out and to protect children and adults from accidental clothing ignition.
- Warn children about the danger of fire. Do not let them play with fire.
- Keep flammable materials such as carpets, pillows, furniture, or papers away from the fireplace area.

- At holiday time, make sure the Christmas tree is not close enough to be ignited by a spark.

WARNING!

Do not use a paper bag to dispose of ashes.



Can Your Ashes!



Can Your Ashes

The Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department is proud to sponsor a public service program concerning fireplace ash disposal. The program is entitled "Ashes to Ashes; Houses All Burn Down" and is geared toward educating homeowners of the inherent danger of disposing of fireplace ashes in an improper container or location. We bring you this simple message: "Can Your Ashes."

Proper Fireplace Cleaning Methods

When you clean your fireplace, there are a few things to keep in mind.

1. You should always place discarded fireplace ashes in a heavy metal container, moisten the ashes and cover the container with a metal lid. **NEVER USE A PAPER BAG**, a cardboard box, or a plastic trash bag in the cleaning process. Never use a vacuum cleaner to pick up ashes.
2. Ashes should be kept in a metal container outside, away from the house, to cool. Your garage, house, or deck are dangerous locations for ashes to cool. After ashes have cooled in a metal container, it is necessary to find a suitable disposal site. **Never dump fireplace ashes until they have had at least four days to cool.** Even after four days, great care should be given in selecting a dump site. Wooded areas should always be avoided.

Proper Disposal of Fireplace Ashes

Garden areas or flower beds are ideal locations to dump

cooled fireplace ashes, allowing many nutrients to return to the soil. Please survey the area and evaluate any additional hazards before disposing of your cooled ashes. Make sure all dry leaves have been removed from the area before dumping your ashes in either a garden or flower bed that is away from the house, and remember to moisten the area.

What Can You Do to Help?

The most important contribution you as a homeowner can make to our campaign is simply to heed our message of prevention and pass it along to family and friends. Our goal is to eliminate this problem in Fairfax County and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Every fire we prevent brings us closer to success. Just remember our simple slogan: **“Can Your Ashes.”**

If you wish to know more about this program, or would like to request this document in an alternative format, please call the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department’s Public Affairs and Life Safety Education at 703-246-3801, TTY 711, or visit our web site at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/fr.



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