

SLEEP EASY CHIMNEY SERVICE

23,600 REASONS TO HAVE YOUR CHIMNEY SERVICED

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, reports that some 23,600 residential fires in the 50 states were related to solid fuel appliances and equipment in 1996. An additional 5,500 fires were attributed to chimneys and chimney connectors serving heating systems burning liquid and other fuels. As a result of these fires, 130 people died, 230 people were injured, and total property losses were set at more than \$184.4 million.

In addition there were a minimum of 119 deaths from carbon monoxide and at least 4,700 "injuries" reported for the same time frame, though most estimates range much higher.

The root cause of most of these losses is that most U.S. homeowners are unaware that chimneys are an integral part of a home heating system and that they require regular evaluation and maintenance. In a great many European countries - including Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Germany - chimney-fire damage statistics have been reduced to negligible numbers because national coalitions of government, insurance companies, fire and building officials, and chimney sweeps have developed tough regulations mandating regularly scheduled chimney inspections and cleaning.

The citizens of those countries understand the hazards of unmaintained chimneys, and their chimney sweeps are regular members of their home safety team.

Most homeowners in the U.S. and Canada, however, seem to have little working knowledge of chimney and venting systems. This situation is complicated by the fact that faults, damage and problems rarely visible to the casual observer. In fact, people who will quickly replace a faulty automobile exhaust system because of the hazard it presents will allow their home's exhaust system the chimney or vent - to go unchecked and unmaintained for years. The threat of chimney fires and unsafe indoor air quality conditions can be greatly reduced, perhaps even eliminated, if homeowners only understood that chimneys are active home operation systems which require regular maintenance.

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THE CHIMNEY SWEEPS ROLE

The primary job of a chimney service professional is to aid in the prevention of fires related to fireplaces, woodstoves, gas, oil and coal heating systems and the chimneys that serve them. Wood burning heating systems, in particular, require careful monitoring and skillful operation.

Chimney sweeps install, clean and maintain these systems, evaluate their performance, prescribe changes to improve their performance, and educate the consumer about their safe and efficient operation. The basic task of a chimney sweep is to clean chimneys. Cleaning means removing the hazard of accumulated and highly combustible creosote produced by burning wood and wood products.

It means eliminating the build-up of soot in coal- and oil-fired systems, it means getting rid of bird and animal nests, leaves and other debris that may create a hazard by blocking the flow of emissions from a home heating appliance. In doing their primary job, sweeps also function as on-the-job fire prevention specialists. They are constantly on the lookout for unsafe conditions that can cause home fires or threaten residents with dangerous or unhealthy indoor air quality.

HOW TO CHOOSE A CHIMNEY SWEEP

What a Homeowner Should Know

The chimney service trade is not regulated, nor are chimney sweeps licensed in most states. Further, opening a chimney service business requires a relatively small capital investment. Thus, virtually anyone - without education, training, experience or even a working knowledge of proper tools or equipment can become a chimney sweep. As a result, many ill-equipped, ill-prepared individuals are free to offer their "services" to homeowners. In some cases, these individuals will take advantage of learning opportunities and become competent, qualified sweeps. In other cases, they will continue along the same path they started on, offering incompetent service and, in some cases providing trusting homeowners with a false sense of well-being. For this very reason, a number of states are currently considering license requirements for chimney sweeps. As precursors to state licensing, some municipalities currently license chimney sweeps. Choose a CSIA (Chimney Safety Institute of America) certified chimney sweep. This is a nationwide organization that provides continued education in conjunction with the National Fire Protection Agency.