

Burning Wood Safely

Burning wood as a heating source can be quite satisfying. Its use, however, can also be quite dangerous. Today, for many of us, using wood for heat is a new adventure. The dangers associated with wood should be understood by each family member; not only the burning of the wood, but also in finding, cutting, hauling, and handling it. Safety should be a prime consideration in the decision to change to wood as a fuel of home heat. You can use wood safely in homes, but each year, because of disregard for safety, many costly, tragic fires occur. This doesn't need to happen. You simply need to use common sense and take precautions.

Safety

Install and maintain smoke detectors. Smoke detectors warn you of fire in time to escape. Install them on each level of your home, follow manufacture's directions, test once a week and replace batteries twice a year.

Plan and practice your escape so everyone knows what to do in case there is a fire.

Insurance Regulation and Building Codes

Contact your insurance company to determine if you are in compliance with their rules and regulations. Failure to notify your insurance company could make your policy coverage worthless.

Installation of any heating system must be done in compliance with your local building codes.

Chimneys

Construct the chimney properly and keep it in good repair and clean of tars and creosote. Sweep according to creosote accumulation.

Creosote does not build up on hot flue walls when sufficient draft is present.

Safe Installation of Wood Burning Equipment

The heating unit must be well-designed and constructed so burning coals, sparks and smoke cannot escape. Set the unit on a non-flammable base large enough so coals or sparks cannot spill onto a flammable floor.

Protect flammable walls or ceilings by keeping stove or pipes at least 36" away. Use a heat shield for reduced distances. Do not place wood, clothing or other flammable materials where heat from the unit could ignite them.

Don't fully load a heating unit, set the draft and immediately leave because the fuel may flare up and overheat.

Provide adequate ventilation so air consumed by combustion can be replaced.

Selecting a Safe Fuel

Firewood burned as a heat source should be well seasoned and as dry as possible. Much of the problem with creosote accumulating in the chimney is caused by burning green or wet wood.

Use Common Sense

Do not place or store oils, gases or volatile liquids where open flames can ignite fumes.

Don't use volatile liquids to start a fire.

Be careful when removing ashes; live coals are often present, which might fall or otherwise contact flammable materials.

Avoid fuels such as pieces of cardboard or dry Christmas greenery, which produce high flames that can cause flue fires.

July, 2008

Department of Conservation
Maine Forest Service
Forest Policy & Management Division

