

SafetyTIPS from Assistant Fire Marshal Doug Jones

An information resource for citizens



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Chimney and Woodstove Safety

From 2004 through 2008 in Oregon, there were 2,899 home heating-related fires resulting in 12 deaths, 85 injuries, and more than \$42 million in property loss. These heating-related fires also resulted in 34 injuries to firefighters.

Fireplaces

Have your chimney inspected by a professional prior to the start of every heating season and cleaned if necessary. Creosote, a chemical substance that forms when wood burns, builds up in chimneys and can cause a chimney fire if not removed through cleaning. Always protect your home and your family by using a sturdy fireplace screen when burning fires. Remember to burn only clean, dry, seasoned firewood - never burn paper or pine boughs, which can float out the chimney and ignite your roof or a neighboring home. Do not use flammable liquids in a fireplace. If you are purchasing a factory-built fireplace, select one listed by a testing laboratory, and have it installed according to local codes. If you decorate your fireplace with Christmas stockings or other seasonal decorations, don't burn fires in it.

Wood Stoves

Be sure your wood stove bears the mark of an independent testing laboratory and meets local fire codes. Building code information dealing with woodstove installations is available at <http://www.portlandonline.com/bds/index.cfm?a=93026&c=45053>. Follow the manufacturer's recommendations for proper installation, use and maintenance. Chimney connections and chimney flues should be inspected at the beginning of each heating season and cleaned when necessary. Follow the same safety rules for wood stoves as you would for space heaters. Burn only clean, dry firewood, and be sure the wood stove is placed on an approved non-combustible stove board or hearth to protect the floor from heat and hot coals. Fireplaces and wood burning stoves are auxiliary home heating devices that demand care and attention in their purchase, installation, and maintenance. For someone considering the installation of a wood or coal stove, a fireplace, or a solid-fuel furnace, careful consideration must be given to the safety aspects of the equipment and the installation. Expert advice is often required. Instructions must be followed to the letter.

Following these precautions can reduce the possibility of a fire or injury related to woodstove use.

- All wood burning stoves and fireplaces should be cleaned and inspected before the heating season begins.
- Make sure that the door latch closes properly.

- Furnaces and water heaters which have flue pipes attached to the chimney of a fireplace or wood burning stove should have tight fitting joints and seams.
- Never use liquid fuel to start the fire in a fireplace or wood burning stove.
- Ashes need to be thoroughly dampened, cooled, and stored outside away from the building in metal cans that are used solely for ash storage, **not** in compost piles, cartons, boxes or anything else that is combustible.
- It is important to use only thoroughly dried hardwood. This will prevent or slow the buildup of creosote in the chimney that is the cause of many chimney fires.
- Have the chimney and flue inspected by a qualified mason or chimney sweep prior to use. Cracks in the flue or mortar joints can allow flames and heated gases to extend into the walls or attic of a structure.
- Use a fireplace screen to prevent flying sparks and embers from falling out onto the floor.
- Install and maintain smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors to provide protection for your family.
- Although following these precautions should reduce your risk of a chimney fire, be aware of the signs of one and know what to do if you encounter them -- a loud roar, sucking sounds, shaking pipes, hot spots on the wall or chimney, or smoke in the house or apartment. If you hear or see any of these sounds shut off the fire's air supply, get everyone out of the house quickly, and call 911 from a neighbor's phone.

For more fire prevention tips to keep you safe and sound, visit and subscribe to Portland Fire & Rescue's YouTube account at <http://www.youtube.com/PDXFireRescue>.