

SAFETY SENSE

Fireplace Safety Tips

(NAPSA)—When temperatures drop, few things top nestling in front of the fireplace to keep warm and cozy. But experts caution fireplace owners to take a few safety steps before stoking the flames:

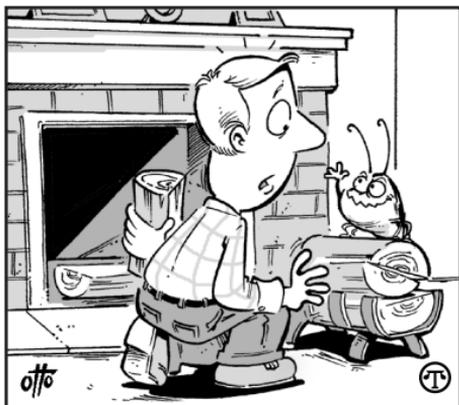
Get Ready

A wood-burning chimney should be inspected every year and swept clean if it has built-up soot deposits. Look for cracks in the mortar or crumbling cement. This is a warning sign that the chimney may need repairs. Keep the top of your chimney clear of tree limbs and debris to avoid any problems. Consider installing a chimney cap to keep animals and leaves out.

Examine the flue to make sure it is clear. To ensure proper ventilation, check that the damper is working properly. When open during fires, it should allow the smoke to get out. However, when there's no fire, the damper should be tightly closed to keep the warmth in and cold out.

Choosing Firewood

"Well-seasoned firewood" is wood that has been thoroughly dried for a minimum of six months and stored properly. It generally has darkened ends with visible cracks or splits and is relatively lightweight. It's easy to start, produces more heat and burns cleaner, reducing the amount of dangerous buildup. "Green" wood has high levels of moisture in it, making it difficult to start. It's also less efficient to burn than seasoned wood because it smolders.



Experts say moving firewood can spread the tree-killing Asian longhorned beetle.

Buying Firewood

Hardwoods are recommended as the best wood for burning in fireplaces. However, they can harbor insects, such as the Asian longhorned beetle (ALB), which lives in and feeds on hardwood trees. These beetles have already caused the destruction of thousands of trees. Because of these bugs, it's important that you not move firewood. Purchase it close to where you plan to use it and make sure that it's from local resources. Don't carry it across county or state lines, because the ALB, its larvae or eggs may be inside and can infest healthy trees wherever you take it.

At the end of the cold season, be sure to burn all the wood that you have, so that any larvae in the dead wood can't spread to living trees.

For more information about this beetle, visit the Web site www.beetlebusters.info.