

# HINTS FOR HOMEOWNERS

## Prepare The Fireplace Now

(NAPSA)—Homeowners should act now to bring warmth and ambience when cold weather arrives. Whether it's maintaining an existing fireplace or freestanding stove, enhancing its appearance, or shopping for something new, a jump on the "burn" season usually means a better deal, as well as faster service.

For those with existing hearth products, the time to start refurbishing and cleaning is now. According to a survey by the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association (HPBA), 10 percent of fireplace and stove owners plan changes involving new accessories, mantels or surrounds.

Maintenance should be completed well before the first cold snap. Hire a professional to inspect the chimney and clean it if necessary. Log on to the Chimney Safety Institute of America web site at [www.csia.org](http://www.csia.org) to find a certified chimney sweep in your area, or inquire about one at your local hearth retailer.

If the chimney doesn't have a cap, install one to prevent debris or animals from falling inside and creating a blockage. Keep the area around the stove or fireplace free from furniture and flammable materials. For added safety, have both a smoke detector and a carbon monoxide detector installed.

For a gas fireplace, clean the logs and adjust the "embers" for maximum effect. Clean the fan, air passages and glass screens. Be sure any vents are unobstructed. Consider contacting a specialty retailer who is trained in servicing gas fireplaces to get a comprehensive maintenance plan.

If a new hearth product is on your "to do" list, the sooner the better. The HPBA survey indicates that more than three million new fireplaces and freestanding stoves were installed in 2004—a number that has more than tripled during the past 10 years. Certified hearth installers will become increasingly busy as the cold weather gets closer.

Whether adding a fireplace to a



**A cozy time by the fire can be easier to achieve than many homeowners realize.**

living room, the master bedroom, or another room in the home, there are a number of options from which to choose.

After selecting the location, choose your fuel—wood, gas, electric, coal or pellet. Feel free to "mix and match" as well—a wood-burning fireplace might be preferred in the living room, but perhaps a gas or electric fireplace in the bedroom would be more convenient.

After deciding which type of fuel to burn, choose a style that complements your home. Leaf through magazines, visit specialty hearth retailers and home improvement stores, and talk to friends about their experiences. Some specialty retailers will make house calls to help homeowners choose the right product for their space and lifestyle. There is a wide variety of designs, styles and sizes of fireplaces, so it will be easy to find the perfect one.

Regardless of where you buy your hearth product, hire a National Fireplace Institute® (NFI) Certified Specialist to install it. An NFI Certified installer has passed a rigorous exam covering important safety codes, venting, and installation guidelines. To find a specialty retailer with NFI Certified staff, visit [www.nficertified.org](http://www.nficertified.org) or visit [www.hpba.org](http://www.hpba.org) to find a retailer with certified installers.

For more information about the wide variety of hearth products, as well as maintenance and safety tips, visit [www.hpba.org](http://www.hpba.org).