



Fireplace Safety

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Fireplace Fires, Injuries and Fatalities

The U.S Consumer Product Safety Commission reported that there were 23,600 residential fires related to fireplaces and barbecues in 1996. Additionally, 5,500 fires were attributed to chimneys and related equipment.

As a result of these fires, 130 people died and 230 people were injured. Total property loss was found to be in excess of \$184 million dollars.

The California State Fire Marshal stated that during the past ten years, there have been 1,313 chimney and fireplace fires that resulted in 10 injuries and nearly \$5 million dollars of property loss.

Over the past two years the Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) has confirmed 18 fires related to chimneys and fireplaces. Although no injuries or deaths were caused from these fires, they did cause property loss totaling half a million dollars.

To assist in keeping residents safe, the following tips will help make sure that your fireplace is working properly and will trim down the risks to your family:

- Make sure your fireplace is designed for the wood you are burning. Don't burn wood in a unit designed for gas logs.
- Keep decorations and furniture at least three-feet away.
- Always use a fireplace screen.
- Don't overload the fireplace with too much wood.
- Make sure the damper is open before lighting the fire.
- Ensure the chimney outlet is equipped with approved spark arrestor.
- Keep a fire extinguisher close by.
- Never leave the fire unattended.
- Never burn trash, plastics or flammable liquids.
- Have the chimney and fireplace inspected and cleaned every year by a certified chimney sweep.



Knowing Your Fireplace

If built properly, fireplaces are dependable and safe to use. Fireplaces, just like anything else, wear over a period of years and need to be maintained to extend their life. There are two types of fireplaces:

Masonry Fireplace These fireplaces are built with bricks and mortar and have a metal or clay flue liner. They are designed to burn various types of wood and may also be equipped with gas logs.

Metal Insert Fireplace A metal firebox is made at a factory and installed as a unit within the framing of the home. A metal flue is also put into place and runs through the roof or exterior wall of the home. Many of these fireplaces are designed solely for gas logs and not intended to burn any solid fuel such as wood. Most of these fireplaces have a small label located near the face of the firebox that identifies the manufacturer in case you don't have any information relating to your model.



Due to the high cost of the construction of a masonry fireplace, many newer homes contain metal insert fireplaces. It is extremely important that these units are installed and used according to the manufacturer requirements. Pay to have it inspected and cleaned by a qualified chimney sweep.

Caring For a Fireplace

You can do a few things that will enhance your enjoyment and the safety of your fireplace:

- Use the fireplace as it was intended. Never burn wood or other materials if the fireplace was designed for artificial gas logs.
- Remember to open the damper before lighting a fire. It may be very difficult to change the damper position once the fire is ignited.
- Clean out debris within the firebox from previous fires. These ashes can swirl into the living space if a breeze or draft blows across them. Throw away ashes in a metal container.
- Make sure that a spark arrestor is in place at the top of the chimney outlet. A spark arrestor prevents hot embers from leaving the chimney and landing on roofs or adjacent property. A spark arrestor has a heavy metal screen with openings $\frac{3}{8}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ inch across.

