

Woodstove Safety Is Encouraged In Winter

Woodburning stoves can save energy, but they can kill if they are not installed and used properly.

The North Carolina Insurance News Service reports that woodburning stoves have caused many deaths and injuries during the past few heating seasons. In many other cases no one died or suffered injury, but fire destroyed or severely damaged homes.

Ironically, Benjamin Franklin designed the Franklin stove to eliminate the dangers of an open fireplace. If it is used properly, any woodburning stove will remove those hazards.

But the stove creates its own hazards if it is installed improperly. Homeowners create one of the most common hazards by placing the stove or its pipe too close to surfaces that can catch on fire. One insurance company reported a North Carolina fire in which two persons died because the stove was installed too close to a wooden surface.

The National Fire Protection Association recommends a three-foot clearance between the stove and any wall, ceiling or other material that will burn. Firewood must be stacked away from the stove. One company reported a home fire with thousands of dollars worth of damage because the wood stack near the stove caught on fire. The homeowner should place the stove itself on a pad that will not catch fire.

The homeowner or commercial installer can create a serious hazard by improperly installing the stove pipe which carries the smoke and gas into the chimney or directly to the outside. The heat buildup in the stove pipe can be enough to ignite walls, ceilings, and other surfaces. You must provide at least a foot and a half of clearance between the pipe and surfaces that will burn. The joints of the pipe must be fitted properly to prevent sparks from escaping.

If you use an existing fireplace chimney, it must be sealed off below the stovepipe's point of entry to prevent toxic gases from backing up into the room. This can be done by sealing off the fireplace opening off the flue itself between the stovepipe connection and the fireplace opening.

You should avoid connecting more than one heating device to a single chimney flue because flue gases and sparks may pass from one flue opening into another and unsatisfactory operation may also result. Be sure your chimney is in good condition and that it has a flue lining. You should check for missing flue tiles and cracked masonry. You may want to have a mason check the chimney for you and make any repairs that may be needed.

If you have no suitable chimney, or if you prefer to close off your fireplace, you can use a factory-built chimney or a metal smokestack. Make sure that what you use has been approved by Underwriters' Laboratories (UL) or another recognized testing laboratory. A factory-built chimney or metal smokestack should rise three feet above any roof ridge that is within ten feet of the stack.

Once you have a safe installation, there are some other things to remember about safe operation.

Don't start fires with flammable liquids. You can kill or injure yourself with such a dangerous practice even if your stove, pipes and chimney are hazard-free. Even if you aren't killed or injured, starting a fire with gasoline or other flammable liquids is dangerous.

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