February 2013
Emergency Preparedness Pointers

Stay Safe and Warm This Winter

The prolonged periods of cold this winter have been hard on home heating bills. Keeping the house warm with a wood burning fireplace or wood stove can be a great source of supplemental heat or the only source of heat during a winter power outage. A crackling, warm fire provides comfort, but it also requires attention. Stay safe and warm this winter by following these wood burning tips.

Clean, Clear and Protected

Before building a nice fire it is important to make sure any wood burning appliance is working properly and that safety measures are in place.

1.) Check the outside of the home to be sure the chimney or stovepipe is clear of any obstructions.

2.) Test the flue damper operation. Be sure that it will open and close fully.

3.) Test the chimney draft. Place some rolled paper in the firebox, open the damper and light the paper to make sure the smoke is drawn up the chimney or pipe. If the smoke does not rise, call a professional to come clean the chimney. An annual inspection and/or cleaning is recommended.

4.) Keep flammable objects, like drapes, books or furniture, at least three feet away from the fire.

5.) Once a fire is started, enclose fireplaces with a metal screen or close the door on a wood burning stove. Small embers can escape and start a fire if not contained by an enclosure.

6.) Keep a fire extinguisher nearby at all times.

7.) Install/maintain smoke and carbon monoxide detectors on every level of the home.

The "Never Burn" List

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) states that the following materials should never be burned in a household wood burning appliance.

- **Household garbage or cardboard**: Plastics, foam and the colored ink on magazines, boxes, and wrappers produce harmful chemicals when burned. They may also damage your wood-burning appliance.
- **Coated, painted, pressure treated or any type of glued wood (plywood, particle board)**: These release toxic chemicals when burned.
- **Wet, rotted, diseased or moldy wood:** Wet wood produces lots of smoke, rotted wood may produce bad odors and diseased or moldy wood could be home to bacteria that will cause illness from handling it.

Best Practices for Wood Burning in the Home

Once everything has been checked and the safety measures are in place, a nice, clean fire can be started.

- Wood should be seasoned outdoors for six months before burning it. Well seasoned wood is darker, has cracks in the end grain and sounds hollow when struck against another piece of wood.
- Fires should be started using newspaper or dried kindling. Chemical accelerants should not be used to either start or increase a fire.
- Build a hot, but not roaring, fire. Hot burning fires can help reduce creosote buildup; roaring fires can ignite existing creosote in chimneys. A smoldering fire will not heat the area efficiently.
- Help maintain good airflow by regularly removing ashes. Place the ashes in a metal container with a cover and store them safely outside, away from any combustible material.
- If the fire will be unattended for long periods, make sure it is all the way out. Do not close the damper with hot ashes still in a fireplace. The closed damper will help heat the fire up again and force carbon monoxide and smoke into the house.

For more fireplace safety info watch these videos at: http://www.monkeysee.com/play/16539-fireplace-safety

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