

# Chimney and Woodstove Fire Safety



In 2007, there were 880 fire incidents involving chimneys, fireplaces, and woodstoves. These fires were responsible for 1 civilian death, 3 civilian injuries, 13 fire service injuries, and resulted in \$3.3 million in property losses. These incidents make up 29% of all fires linked to heating systems.

## Purchasing

- Be sure the stove you are purchasing to burn wood, pellet or coal is approved by Underwriter's Laboratory or another recognized testing laboratory.

## Installation

- A building permit must be obtained prior to the installation of fireplaces, wood, pellet or coal burning stoves. They must be inspected by the local building inspector prior to their initial use as required by the Massachusetts State Building Code.
- Allow at least 36 inches of clearance around the appliance to prevent combustibles from coming into contact with a heat source.
- Solid fuel heating appliances cannot share a common flue with chimney flues utilized by other solid fuel, fossil fuel, or gas fired appliances.

## Inspections

- Have the chimney and flue inspected by a qualified mason prior to use. Cracks in the flue or mortar joints can allow flames and heated gases to extend into the structure.

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## **FireFACTORS**

Office of the State Fire Marshal  
Department of Fire Services

P.O. Box 1025 State Road • Stow, Massachusetts 01775 • (978) 567-3300 • [www.mass.gov/dfs](http://www.mass.gov/dfs)

## Proper Use

- Most chimney fires occur due to a build-up of **creosote**, a tarry by-product of burning wood. Have your chimney flue cleaned before each heating season. Burn only dry, well-seasoned, hardwood to reduce creosote accumulation.
- Do not use flammable liquids to start the fire.
- Never leave children unattended near the stove.
- Check that the damper is open before lighting the fire. Failure to do so can result in an accumulation of smoke and carbon monoxide within the home. Do not close the damper before the fire has died out and the embers are cold.
- Use a fireplace screen to prevent flying sparks and embers from falling out onto the floor.
- Install and maintain smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors to provide protection for your family.

## Proper Ash Disposal

- Ashes cleaned out from the stove or fireplace should be shoveled into a metal bucket with a metal lid, placed outside, on the ground, away from the building, to prevent fires. Do not place ashes into a paper bag or cardboard box. Ashes and embers can stay hot for days and ignite combustibles.



## Carbon Monoxide & Smoke Alarms

- Carbon monoxide alarms are required now in all homes with chimneys or woodstoves. Install one on every habitable level and no more than 10 feet from every bedroom door. Smoke alarms should be installed on every level of your home, at the bottom of every stairwell and outside each sleeping area.