

# Gas Fireplace and Chimney Safety

Gas fireplaces can be a great addition to any home. In recent years they have gained in popularity because they are cleaner and more efficient than their wood-burning counterparts. There are some things you should know to ensure your gas fireplace is working properly and to keep your family and house safe. Just like wood-burning fireplaces, gas fireplaces require routine maintenance or they can be dangerous. Therefore, it is important to address problems as soon as they arise.

When you are looking to do some routine maintenance, be sure to use a specialty retailer who is trained in the maintenance of gas fireplaces. If you do anything on your own, make sure the gas is turned *off*. No work should begin with the gas valve on. If anything seems odd with the unit, call a licensed gas technician. When you are working with gas, you want to be sure not to take any chances.

Before you “flick the switch” on your gas fireplace for the first time this season, be sure to follow these safety and maintenance tips.

When you are performing routine maintenance on your gas fireplace, check the ventilation system. If anything limits the ventilation system from working correctly, such as a leak or a clog, it needs to be fixed immediately.

Many homeowners understand that they need to get their chimney cleaned and inspected if they use a wood-burning fireplace or stove, but many don't realize that a gas-heating appliance (furnace, boiler, gas fireplace, or hot water heater) also uses a chimney or some sort of flue for venting its exhaust. Although gas appliances usually do not produce soot, they do leave residue that can erode your chimney. In many cases, there are no warnings that there is a problem until it's too late. Two common problems you could have are incomplete combustion or condensation buildup.

Any of the following issues could point to corrosion by acidic water in the flue:

- Dampness on interior or exterior walls
- Peeling wallpaper
- Blistered paint
- Stains on the ceiling around chimney
- White stains on the outside of the chimney
- Eroded mortar
- Crumbling bricks

Chimney sweeps often find flaking mortar and bricks blocking the flue, potentially exposing the homeowners to carbon monoxide. Have the chimney evaluated by a certified chimney sweep who can make recommendations and ensure your system is working safely.

Other routine maintenance check points:

- Always read the manufacturer's instruction manual first.
- If your gas fireplace has a fan to spread the heat throughout the room, make sure that it is working properly.

- Every couple of months you should clean the glass door for build-up. Make sure to use a cleaner that is safe for gas fireplaces. You can find one at your local hardware store. When cleaning the fake logs, use a soft bristle log cleaning brush.
- The pilot light can be turned off when the fireplace is not in use, for example during the off-season; it can also be turned back on when you are ready to use it.

If you choose to use a specialty retailer for your gas fireplace service, they can clean and adjust the embers and logs; clean the fan and glass; check the batteries in the carbon monoxide detector; and ensure the flue vents are clear.

Whether you choose to perform maintenance on your own or use a professional, you can enjoy a well-maintained gas fireplace and be confident that your family and home are both safe.