



University of Idaho
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The Creosote Problem: Chimney Fires and Chimney Cleaning

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The combustion process when wood is burned is never complete. The smoke from a wood fire usually

driest wood possible and using only small pieces of wood during mild weather when combustion is relatively slow. The stack temperature can be raised by insulating the stove pipe connection so that it cools as little as possible before reaching the chimney. Using an insulated pipe also aids in increasing the stack temperature.

Draft can be increased by having as few bends as possible between the appliance and the chimney, having the proper height and diameter, keeping the chimney in good repair, and by having a separate flue for each appliance. Also use proper sized stove pipe. In a large chimney, draft can be increased by decreasing the flue size. This can be done by installing a new smaller flue or a stainless steel stove pipe liner.

In many air-tight stoves, a sealed overnight fire will deposit creosote even with dry hardwood. To dry the creosote always open the draft caps and let the fire burn hot for at least 5 minutes every morning and again before bedtime.

chimney fires and improve the draft as well. How often the chimney is cleaned depends on how frequently the wood burning appliance is used, how it is operated and the type of installation. Some authorities recommend cleaning the chimney after every third cord of wood is burned and most recommend at least once a year. Any time you observe excessive soot and creosote, the chimney should be cleaned. After you once have cleaned the chimney, you may want to check it after 2 weeks, 1 month, 2 months, etc., to determine how often your chimney needs to be cleaned.

You may have the chimney cleaned for you by professional chimney sweeps or you can clean it yourself. Costs for chimney sweeps vary with the job but usually amount to about \$40. In addition to cleaning your chimney, a good chimney sweep can act as a safety inspector for your installation.

Chimneys are normally cleaned by mechanical means to scrape off any loose creosote build-up. Stiff wire chimney cleaning brushes are available at reasonable cost (Figure 2). They are constructed to match the size of the chimney flue and can be pushed through the chimney with extension rods or pipe or can be pulled with ropes on either end of the brush. You can attach a weight to the bottom of chimney so it can be pulled up with a rope. Other cleaning methods are to lower a burlap bag containing wire netting weighted with chains or rocks up and down the chimney or to use

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