



**SEPTEMBER SAFETY MESSAGE**  
**Albany Fire Department Fire Prevention and Public**  
**Education Division**

## **FIREPLACE, WOOD STOVE AND CHIMNEY SAFETY**

During the winter, your fireplace or wood stove becomes your friend. It keeps you warm, provides you with a cheery glow, and makes your life more comfortable. While your fireplace or wood stove is not used, it is time to prepare for the upcoming winter season.

A necessary part of your fireplace is the screen. Since the screen separates the fire from your living area, it is a protection device. If your screen is damaged or worn out, replace it. Choose one with safety in mind. A well-fitting screen prevents sparks from escaping the fireplace and will provide the best security.

Wood stoves are increasing in popularity. They are effective and efficient when installed properly. Incorrectly installed wood stoves are a disaster, however. Read and follow all manufacturer's instructions to ensure a wood stove is ready for safe use.

Too often neglected, the chimney is a part of your heating system which requires yearly attention. If it has been more than one year since your chimney has been cleaned, it is lined with a highly flammable substance – creosote. As the amount of creosote increases in the chimney, so does the chance of a chimney fire.

During a chimney fire, strong drafts may carry large chunks of burning creosote 10 to 20 feet into the air, possibly igniting a roof, nearby trees, sheds, lawns or anything else with which it comes in contact. The possibility of this is a strong argument for the installation of spark arresters. Spark arresters on the top opening of the chimney prevent embers from escaping. Also, additional dangers are present during a chimney fire. The temperature inside the chimney can reach 1700 – 2000 degrees. This intense heat melts the mortar between the flue liners, and in places where there may be gaps in the flue lining. Therefore, it allows the fire to come in contact with the structure of the house itself.

There are chemicals which can be purchased for (supposedly) cleaning chimneys. They are not approved or recommended by the State Fire Marshal's office. In fact, if used improperly, they have the potential to cause damage to your chimney. The most effective way to prevent the trauma of a chimney fire is to have a professional chimney sweep clean the residue from your chimney.

Whether you have a wood stove or a fireplace, you still have the problem of disposing of the ashes. Even though the fire may appear "cold," there may still be warm embers capable of igniting other combustible materials. Dispose of all ashes in a metal container. Do not put other combustibles in the same container as the ashes.

Please contact Albany Fire Prevention for further information about Fire and Life Safety  
At 510-528-5775.

