
Chimney Sweep

**Keep Santa's Suit Clean and
Red. It's Time to Call the
Chimney Sweep.**



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Chimneys need to be cleaned if you use it once a year or 365 times a year.

When home-heating costs began to rise significantly in the 1970s and 1980s, many homeowners turned to wood as a cheaper source of energy. Along with this renewed interest in firewood came a boom in the wood-burning stove market. While homeowners did enjoy a reduced dependency on expensive natural gas and electricity, wood-burning stoves brought back many of the problems homeowners faced a hundred years ago. Over time, the accumulation of soot, creosote and other by-products created a fire hazard that could only be eliminated by a professional chimney sweep. This created a new cottage industry of independent chimney sweep companies and fireplace safety inspectors.

Before hiring a chimney sweep, you may want to ask for the company's credentials or the sweep's level of training. Chimney sweep companies often belong to national trade associations with strict guidelines concerning training and services. Independent chimney sweeps may also receive certification from recognized fire safety training centers. Unfortunately, the increased demand for chimney sweep services has led to a number of fly-by-night operations. A trained chimney sweep should do more than run a wire brush through the chimney several times and leave. Word-of-mouth advertising from neighbors with wood-burning stoves should provide solid leads.

The Work

The primary job of a chimney service professional is to aid in the prevention of fires related to fireplaces, wood stoves, gas, oil and coal heating systems and the chimneys that serve them. Chimney sweeps install, clean and maintain these systems, evaluate their performance, prescribe changes to improve their performance, and educate the consumer about their safe and efficient operation.

In doing their primary job of inspecting and sweeping chimneys, chimney professionals also function as on-the-job fire prevention specialists. They are constantly on the lookout for unsafe conditions that can cause home fires or threaten residents with dangerous or unhealthy indoor air quality.

Chimney sweeps clean the chimneys of open fires, and the flues of other heating systems and cooking appliances, to reduce the risks of chimney fires and the emission of dangerous fumes. They may also have technical expertise in the safe operation and maintenance of chimneys, appliances and the installation of flue systems, stainless steel flexible liners and flue terminations.

To clean a chimney, the chimney sweep inserts a suitable brush and pushes it through the length of the chimney using extendible rods, until all soot and debris is removed. They then use an industrial vacuum cleaner to remove soot and debris from the chimney base/fireplace, opening or

heating appliance. Some jobs may also involve going up onto the roof. Chimney sweeps bring all their own equipment to a job.

After completing a job, chimney sweeps who are members of the National Association of Chimney Sweeps issue a certificate of chimney sweeping. They will also advise the property owner about any potential hazards and faults.

The Necessity for Chimney Sweeping

Before hiring a chimney sweep to clean out your fireplace flue or chimney, you should ask yourself a few questions. First of all, can you perform the same tasks yourself without going through the expense of hiring a professional? A chimney sweep probably won't volunteer to clean out your collection of ashes or clean the visible portions of your stove or fireplace. Those tasks can be very messy and time-consuming, but a diligent homeowner can probably do just as well as a professional with the right cleaning equipment. If your needs are largely cosmetic, you shouldn't need to call in a chimney sweep.

If you've been burning wood for several months, especially oily firewood such as pine, you'll need a professional chimney sweep to remove build-up of a natural substance called creosote. Creosote is released while the firewood burns and naturally clings to the inner walls of the flue or chimney. Unlike soot, creosote cannot be removed with a wire brush alone. If the accumulated creosote and soot become hot enough, the result is often a chimney fire. If you regularly burn oily firewood and suspect a build-up of creosote, definitely call a professional chimney sweep. He or she may use chemicals in addition to brushes to break up the hardened creosote.

Points to Consider: Availability and Budget

A chimney sweeps have busy season, much like a tax preparer. Most customers try to hire a chimney sweep during the fall or winter months in order to prepare for cold weather. It might be easier to schedule an appointment for late spring or summer for anything other than an emergency. Some homes with a heavy dependency on wood burning stoves may need three or four cleanings throughout the coldest months. Ask about availability when booking a chimney sweep -- you may have to wait several months for an opening.

If there are budgetary concerns, try to find a chimney sweep that only performs cleanings and inspections, not repairs. Sweeps who work for larger maintenance companies may suddenly discover several other problems during a cleaning session, leaving the owner vulnerable to additional service plans. A good chimney sweep should have state-of-the-art inspection equipment and cleaning tools, but should not use the cleaning session as a launching point for upgrades and general repairs. It's not improper for a chimney sweep to point out potential hazards during an inspection, but homeowners should be able to hire other contractors for those repairs.

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