



Wood Burning Stoves Safety Tips

Many people have turned to wood burning stoves as a supplementary method of heating their homes. They offer the promise of cheaper fuel costs combined with a rustic beauty that is unique among heating sources. However, wood stoves also come with some serious potential drawbacks.

The Danger of a House Fire

From a hazard standpoint, it's pretty easy to understand that burning wood inside your dwelling increases the risk of fire. To minimize this danger, a homeowner has to know the do's and don'ts of wood stove installation and operation.

What NOT to Do:

- Don't burn trash or other refuse in a wood stove!
- Don't start a stove fire using a flammable liquid, such as gasoline or kerosene!
- Don't let a wood fire burn unattended or overnight!

The Danger to Children

The risk of being burned by a wood stove is well understood by adults, but children are another matter. Even when they recognize the danger, children are still apt to play and roughhouse around one. Therefore, it's critical that a child guard screen or hearth safety gate be placed around the wood stove. These products separate children from the stove yet allow access for adults, usually through a gate with a child proof locking mechanism.

Other child safety issues to consider:

- Wood chips and pellets if spilled or left within a child's reach can pose a choking hazard.
- Pollutants put in the indoor air by a stove can adversely affect a child with asthma.
- Wood stove pokers, rakes and other tools need to be placed outside the reach of small children.

What to Do:

- **Professional Installation** – Having a licensed, experienced professional install your wood stove is probably the single most important safety step a homeowner can take. A professional will make sure that all clearances between the stove and the wall, floor and ceiling are proper, as well as installing the stove pipe in a proper and safe manner. The installer will also make sure the stove meets all state regulations and local codes.

- **Use Dry, Seasoned Wood** – Green wood has too high a moisture content to make it efficient for burning. Hardwoods (apple, red oak, maple, etc...) that have been dried for at least 6-12 months offer the best efficiency and also minimize the build up of creosote (an oily substance from incomplete combustion that can catch fire) on the lining of the stove pipe.

- **Annual Maintenance** – Have your wood stove professionally inspected and cleaned annually, before each heating season. The small cost of an annual service call is well worth the value of protecting your home and family.

For more on wood stove safety, visit the Insurance Information Institute Web site at www.iii.org.