

## Wood Burning Fireplace Maintenance

Every year thousands of people safely heat their homes with wood. Unfortunately, some homes are lost to fires caused by poor operation and maintenance of home heating equipment. Although wood heat is an economical and renewable heat source, poor wood-burning practices can cause dangerous and devastating home and chimney fires. Since 2007, MAX has paid over \$2.2 million in claims due to fire losses. This is a deep concern for MAX. Not only do we want to prevent these losses from occurring to control our members' costs, but most importantly, we want our members' lives protected from such dangerous losses.



You can help prevent fire losses by following these simple precautionary measures:

### Chimney Sweep

You should have a professional sweep your chimney and inspect your fireplace annually to make sure it's safe. Between professional inspections, do your own checks and maintenance to monitor and enhance the unit's performance.

### Checking Chimney Caps

A cap fitted with wire mesh sides covers the hole at the top of the chimney. It keeps rain, birds, animals and debris from entering. Replace or repair a cap that is missing or damaged.

### Watch for Formation of Creosote



Creosote is a flammable substance that is hard, dark, and crustlike. It is produced during incomplete combustion of wood. An accumulation of creosote can cause a dangerous chimney fire, so it must be removed.

You can minimize creosote by burning dry hardwoods, since their lower moisture content promotes more complete burning.

A hot fire produces less creosote than smoldering woods. Increase the air supply if necessary so that wood burns more completely. Avoid slow burning smoky fires which are a good indication that the wood is not burning completely.

## Precautionary Measures Continued...

### **Identifying Soot**

Soot is a flammable deposit, dark in color but softer than creosote. Most chimney sweeps recommend cleaning when soot deposits reach 1/8-inch in depth.

### **Proper Ash Disposal**

Store ashes in a non-combustible metal container with a tightly fitted lid. Place the closed container on a non-combustible floor, well away from combustible materials. If ashes are to be buried or locally dispersed, store them in a sealed container until all cinders have cooled.



## Actual MAX Member Fire Loss Story

*The following story is of an actual loss for a MAX member. We are sharing this story because we don't want this to happen to you. Be safe this heating season.*

A MAX member who runs a large commercial farm and owns several locations with farm homes on the land had a serious fire loss. On one of these locations, a farm worker rented a home from our member. The home had a woodstove in it, that was being used by the tenant.

The entire farm home burned down as a result of a chimney fire from the woodstove. It was later discovered that a build up of creosote in the flu of the woodstove had ignited and caused the fire. Because of the remote location of the farmhouse and the building materials, there was not enough time to save the home or the contents of the tenant.

Source for precautionary measures: Wickell, Janet. Woodburning Fireplace Maintenance. Retrieved December 9, 2011, from [http://homebuying.about.com/cs/fireplacesafety/a/wood\\_fireplace.htm](http://homebuying.about.com/cs/fireplacesafety/a/wood_fireplace.htm).