



City of Madison Fire Department

News Release

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Tis the Season to Check Chimneys

Two weekend calls for chimney fires prompts a reminder that before starting the roaring fire to ward off the winter chill, make certain your fireplace is clean, properly vented, and structurally sound.

The National Fire Protection Association reports that heating equipment is involved in thousands of U.S. home structure fires each year, with chimneys and chimney connectors accounting for the largest share of fire incidents (36% in 2005).

Firefighters were called to a home on the City's east side Saturday night after neighbors saw flames coming from the top of the chimney. That turned out to be a consequence of too much fuel. The homeowner called 911 after the fire had been extinguished to make sure there was no fire remaining in the chimney or adjacent walls.

A second fire yesterday afternoon caused \$700 in damages at 1701 Prairie Rd. Firefighters from Engine Company 7 were called after a passerby notified the occupants of the chimney fire. Firefighters discovered framing on top of the wood-encased flue was smoldering. No one was injured.

These tips from the Chimney Safety Institute of America outline the most common causes of chimney fires:

Is your damper fully open? Everybody eventually forgets to open the damper. Many dampers also cease to fully open because of water damage or soot buildup behind them on the smoke shelf.

Green or wet firewood. If your wood is not dry and well seasoned it makes more smoke than heat and there simply may not be enough heat for the chimney to work properly.

Dirt! The gradual accumulation of soot can seriously affect the way your chimney performs. Thick layers of soot of course can physically restrict the flue so there is no longer enough free area to vent the fireplace properly. Birds and small animals also think your chimney looks like a hollow tree in which to set up housekeeping. Sweeps often find chimneys literally packed full of leaves, twigs and baby animals. The solution of course is a good cleaning and a chimney cap.

Other issues stem from the design of a chimney itself. So when you are having maintenance performed, a reliable chimney sweep can diagnose any design flaws that might cause a safety concern.

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