



Washington
PUBLIC FIRE EDUCATORS
"Teaching for a Safer Tomorrow"

Position Statement

CHIMNEY CLEANING DEVICES and PRODUCTS

The use of chimney sweeping logs, flare devices, soot devils and similar products is not an adequate substitute for mechanical chimney cleaning and inspection because they do not provide for the same level of protection to the chimney system.

BACKGROUND

Each time you burn wood in your fireplace or woodstove, tar and creosote are formed and over time, will build up on the inside of your chimney. This build-up is highly flammable and can ignite causing a chimney fire. To prevent chimney fires, the fire service has long recommended having your chimney cleaned and inspected annually by a licensed professional. But now, a number of new products on the market (chimney sweeping logs, flare devices, soot devils, etc.) have many citizens wondering whether an annual mechanical cleaning remains necessary.

Many of these products are claimed to reduce deposits of tar and creosote thus reducing the risk of chimney fires. Washington Public Fire Educators (WPFE) is concerned about these claims. While we won't dispute what these products will do, we feel that it's vital to address what they won't do. If these products manage to loosen creosote so it flakes off the flue walls as the advertisements claim, where does that creosote go? It either catches fire as it flakes off and increases the potential for a chimney fire through the intense burning, or it falls to the bottom and collects on the smoke shelf, thus causing a future hazard.

WPFE agrees with the Chimney Safety Institute of America's statement: "The use of these products alone is not an adequate substitute for mechanical chimney cleaning and inspection because it does not provide for the same level of protection to the chimney system." (The Chimney Safety Institute of America is a non-profit, educational institution focused on the prevention of chimney and venting hazards.)

WPFE believes that the safest and most effective chimney maintenance is achieved through annual inspections and mechanical sweeping.

The basic task of a chimney sweep is to clean chimneys. The cleaning process includes 1) removing the hazard of accumulated and highly combustible creosote produced by burning wood and wood products, 2) eliminating the build-up of soot in coal- and oil-fired systems and 3) removing bird and animal nests, leaves and other debris that may create a hazard by blocking the flow of emissions from a home heating appliance. In addition to the cleaning, chimney inspections often reveal hidden problems within the structure that could be potentially dangerous such as breaks or breaches in the flue.

Mechanical sweeping of chimneys not only removes layers of creosote from surfaces, it also eliminates the resulting debris from the chimney, fireplace, or woodstove. Many chimneys are not constructed in a straight path from the firebox to the outside. If chimney-cleaning products perform as claimed and cause debris in the chimney to fall, that debris must still be removed from the smoke shelf, baffle, catalytic combustor, or offset in order to ensure a safe and properly functioning chimney.

VITAL POINTS

- *Have your chimney cleaned and inspected by a licensed professional at least once a year.*
- *Only burn seasoned, dry wood.*
- *Have working smoke alarms on each level of your home and in every bedroom.*
- *Have a home emergency escape plan and practice it.*
- *If you have a chimney fire, evacuate your home and call 9-1-1*

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/REFERENCES

Chemical products that claim to clean or assist in cleaning chimney are not new. Some of these chemical products are used successfully by professional chimney sweeps in conjunction with the mechanical cleanings.

In some situations, a chimney can develop a hard or tacky layer of creosote that cannot be removed by mechanical brushing alone. Under the supervision of a qualified chimney professional, certain chemical cleaners may be used to alter the chemical composition of the hard or tacky layer of creosote into a brittle or powdery condition thus facilitating its removal.

- *Chimney Safety Institute of America www.csia.org*