

Fire Chief Offers Wood Stove Tips

By Relic

It's beginning to sound like a broken record... the price of heating oil, gas and electricity have all gone up again. Between those prices and the uncertainties of y2k and solar flares, it's no wonder that more and more of us are turning to wood.

After all, one cord (two ricks in the South:) of dry oak puts out about the same amount of heat as 165 gallons of #2 stove oil at about half the cost.

There are some potentially serious problems as many are turning to wood heat for the first time. It's a lot of fun, as well as exercise, to go out in the woods, cut down a tree and chop it up, then warm yourself by your own efforts.

Great Grandma would have said, "No, no and no!!!" Try not to burn green wood.(just because it's not wet with rain doesn't mean it's dry.) or you'll use most of the heat from the wood in drying it out before you get any heat from it... and could rapidly cause a creosote build-up which leads to the very real chance of a chimney fire.

Ah, yes... a chimney fire. The sound of an express train roaring through... flames soaring into the sky... chunks of burning creosote floating onto the roof and down onto the ground. Terrifying! Call the fire department. They'd rather have a truck just standing by for an hour than arrive just in time to watch your home burn to the ground.

Great Grandma would have dumped salt on the fire and closed the stove down tight. We have a few added options: our fire department (at least for now), smoke alarms and fire extinguishers at strategic places. Never, I repeat.. never throw water on a cast iron stove!!! It could cause the stove to crack wide open and then you have a major, major disaster!

It's a good idea to throw a couple of tablespoons of a soot reducer on your fire each week. And practice escape routes from your home with every member of the family. Don't leave the house or go to bed until the fire is banked and the stove tightly closed.

In fact, if you're going to be away, shut every door in your house. That way, if a fire does start, lack of oxygen may cause it to die. One woman, returning from an evening away, opened the door to her guest room. It was full of smoke and the bed was burned to cinders, but there was no fire, it had died from the lack of oxygen (fire breathes, you know).

There are a couple of other danger spots; not having an inch of dead air space between your firewall and the house wall (spontaneous combustion starts a 200') and fireplace inserts. If you close up the fireplace for an insert without leaving an access to clean out the creosote, which tends to fall back down the chimney, you may have quite a blaze.

Here are a few more little tips to add to your enjoyment of wood heat: keep an airspace at the back as well as front of your fire so that it can breathe; keep a bed of hot coals as that's where

your real heat comes from; don't ever hang anything burnable where it can be blown or fall against the stove (That's where a beautiful new robe went); and scrounge an old fashioned popcorn popper, lovely on a cold winter's eve...and save on electricity by enjoying an open fire.

(Most of this information was given to me by Sheridan, Oregon fire chief Gene Smail)