HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

CHECK OUT YOUR FIREPLACE

Dreaming about sitting in front of a cozy fire this winter? If you're lucky enough to have a fireplace in your home, it's important to make sure everything is in working order before you build the first fire of the season.

HAVE YOUR CHIMNEY CLEANED

Having your fireplaces and chimney cleaned every year or two will help you avoid respiratory problems often caused by soot and creosote (produced when wood is burned) and – even more important – prevent the deadly build-up of carbon monoxide caused by clogged flues and other venting problems. Not only should you remove soot and dust, but you'll also need to scrape off the creosote that builds up on the chimney walls. While it is possible to tackle this job on a do-it-yourself basis, most people hire a chimney sweep.

> **CREOSOTE IS A FIRE HAZARD**
>
> As little as 1/8" of creosote can cause a chimney fire.

WHAT A CHIMNEY SWEEP SHOULD CHECK

In addition to removing creosote and other residue from the inside of the chimney, a reputable sweep should look at other safety issues:

1. Check the condition of both the flue and the firebox to make sure that mortar is not missing from the joints.
2. Check for obstructions in the chimney (birds' nests, dead animals, and other things blocking the flue).
3. Check that the damper is working properly. (On a wood-burning fireplace, close the damper when no fire is burning; on a gas fireplace, leave the damper open all the time.)
4. Make sure the ashpit door seals completely.

In addition to conventional fireplaces, sweeps will also clean gas-burning fireplaces and fireplaces with wood-burning inserts. They may suggest a chimney cap, to keep animals from taking up residence in your chimney and prevent moisture from entering.

> **WHY KEEP WATER OUT?**
>
> Water that drips down your chimney can combine with built-up creosote to produce acids, and with ashes at the bottom of the chimney to produce lye, both of which can cause expensive repairs.

USE YOUR FIREPLACE SAFELY

Even after your chimney has been professionally cleaned and checked, remain safety-conscious when you use your fireplace. *Never* leave a fire unattended. Use screens or doors to prevent sparks from igniting materials nearby. Finally, make sure you have a working smoke detector and fire extinguisher on each floor of your home.

Home Repair Resource Center empowers homeowners to maintain their homes for sustainable and diverse communities.

WWW.HRRC-CH.ORG **+1.216.381.6100** **2520 Noble Road, Cleveland Heights, OH 44121**

© 2026, Home Repair Resource Center