

Don't neglect your furnace (or it might neglect you!)

(NC)—Along with its effect on the colour of leaves, the autumn season in Canada brings those first cool nights that trigger the urge to switch on the old furnace or boiler, rousing it from months of dormancy. This is also the time of year homeowners should be thinking about having their home heating equipment cleaned and checked. Be sure your furnace is ready to battle the icy grip of winter by arranging a maintenance visit from your local heating contractor.

There are a number of components in your heating system that require regular inspection, including the heat exchanger, ignition system, fan, motor, bearings, belts,

pumps, controls, exhaust, burners, pilot, thermostat, venting system and more. A properly licensed contractor will be able to identify problem areas and will recommend solutions that will ensure your year-round comfort. In the meantime, be sure to regularly replace the air filter on your forced air furnace and keep areas around hot air registers, return air grills or radiators free from obstructions.

For information on where to find a qualified contractor in your area, check out the website of the Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Institute of Canada at www.hrai.ca, or call 1-877-467-HRAI.

Prepping the fireplace for the season

People looking to embrace the cold-weather season often find snuggling up in front of a roaring fire is both relaxing and warming. Fireplaces are popular components of homes across the country. Ensuring fireplaces are prepared for a season of use is important from a safety standpoint and for personal comfort as well.

The U.S. Fire Administration states that heating fires account for 36 percent of residential home fires in rural areas every year. Often these fires are due to creosote buildup in chimneys and stovepipes. All home heating systems require regular maintenance to function safely and efficiently.

One of the most important steps to fireplace maintenance and preparation is having the entire thing cleaned by a professional. A chimney sweep provides a variety of services. According to Ace Chimney Sweeps of Maryland, a chimney sweep will clean out the entire chimney. Many use a high-powered vacuum so that there is no soot or dust entering the home. Depending on the range of services, some sweeps also offer a series of inspections of the chimney, interior flue and checks of attic spaces for any damaged areas that will need repair.

The next step will be securing your source of fuel. Many homeowners contract with a provider of seasoned firewood. A delivery of one or two cords of wood may take the average fireplace user through the season. Wood can also be purchased at supermarkets or picked up free in different areas. It's not advisable to use wood that has just been cut down. It likely contains high levels of moisture that will result in more smoke than burn power, and could lead to deposits forming on the inside of the chimney. Synthetic logs are also avail-

able, but use caution because they may burn unevenly and put out higher levels of carbon monoxide. Follow directions on the packages of these products carefully.

It is important to inspect a fireplace screen or guard to ensure it can safely protect against embers escaping the fireplace. In homes where there are young children, an added barrier may be needed in front of the fireplace to prevent little hands from touching the hot screen.









It is vital to open up the chimney flue before starting any fire. This allows fresh air to feed the fire and will enable smoke to exit the home. Failure to open the flue can result in smothering, dirty smoke filling the home quite quickly. The flue should be closed after the fire is completely extinguished so that animals and outside debris don't enter the home via the opening.

Be sure to have a metal container for removing and storing hot ashes handy. Embers and ashes can stay hot for quite some time, so they should be placed outdoors, ideally far from the home so they don't set anything ablaze.

Educate household members about the rules of fireplace use. They should be aware that no items should be discarded into the fire to avoid the emission of toxic fumes or dangerous embers. All it takes is one stray ember to start a huge fire. Also, improper fuel materials may lead to the buildup of flammable creosote on the chimney.

A fireplace can be a focal point, a source of home heating and just a nice place to which to retire when the weather is cold. Preparing the fireplace for use and maintaining it properly are the keys to a safe season of use.

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