

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

PRESS RELEASE

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MAKE A CLEAN SWEEP FOR SAFETY THIS AUTUMN

With summer drawing to an end and the weather feeling distinctly autumnal, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) is advising people to make sure their chimneys are ready for the colder months ahead.

The reminder is also being issued in support of Chimney Fire Safety Week (8-15 September), a national initiative which aims to raise awareness of safe chimney use, including the importance of ensuring that chimneys are swept regularly, are clean and that appropriate quality fuel is used.

Open fires are a great way to warm your home and provide a relaxing atmosphere at the same time. However, statistics show that there are approximately **7,000** chimney fires a year in England alone¹ - many of which could have been prevented.

If you have an open fire or a wood burning stove, follow these top tips:

- Fit smoke alarms to each level of your home and test the batteries every week
- Always use a fire guard to protect against flying sparks from hot embers
- Make sure embers are properly put out before you leave the house or go to bed
- Keep chimneys and flues clean and well maintained
- Ensure you use good quality fuel
- Never interrupt the air supply by blocking air vents or air bricks

The National Association of Chimney Sweeps (NACS) advises that chimneys are cleaned regularly according to fuel type as follows:

Smokeless fuels	At least once a year
Bituminous coal	At least twice a year
Wood	Quarterly when in use
Oil	At least once a year
Gas	At least once a year
Biomass	At least once a year

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MAKING BERKSHIRE SAFER

Issued by Ellie Gray, Senior Corporate Communications Officer

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Dave Phillips, Area Manager for Prevention and Protection, said: “Before you light your open fire or wood burning stove this autumn, make sure you get your chimney checked and swept by a registered chimney sweep first. It will probably have been several months since you last lit it, so it is very important to remove any deposits that may have built up and clear any obstructions (e.g. birds’ nests and cobwebs) to reduce the risk of fire.

“As well as being a fire risk, blocked chimneys can also cause potentially deadly carbon monoxide (CO) to enter your home. CO can be produced by any combustion appliance - not just gas appliances - including those that burn fossil fuels e.g. oil, wood and coal. You can’t see it, taste it or smell it, so as well as smoke alarms we strongly advise people to install audible CO detectors to provide an early warning.

“It is also essential to get the chimney and appliance checked regularly by a registered professional. For more information and advice on carbon monoxide, visit the Health and Safety Executive website: www.hse.gov.uk”

As thatched buildings can be especially vulnerable to fire, RBFRS has produced a Thatch Information Pack to help residents of these types of properties. The pack contains a thatched property safety guide, giving detailed information about how to prevent fire. It also includes information sheets, which thatch property owners can use to increase their preventative measures and write down useful information to assist firefighters in the event of a fire.

If you live in a thatched property and would like a copy of the Thatch Information Pack, please contact RBFRS on 0118 938 4403 or email communitysafety@rbfrs.co.uk. You can also access the information online by visiting http://www.rbfrs.co.uk/fs2_thatch.html

To find a NACS approved chimney sweep in your area, visit www.nacs.org.uk

ENDS.

ⁱ Statistics: Fire Kills

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