



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Safer, Cleaner Fireplace Burning

Fireplace fires can cause emergencies and pose serious safety risks, and breathing wood smoke reduces lung function, aggravates heart and lung diseases, and can trigger asthma. The Santa Barbara County Fire Department and the Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District have the following suggestions to protect your health and safety – and the health and safety of our community.

Clean your chimney. How long has it been since your chimney was cleaned? A dirty chimney full of creosote is a chimney fire waiting to happen. Schedule regular maintenance by a professional chimney sweep. Do not use your fireplace if it has loose bricks or needs to be cleaned.

If you use artificial logs, do not treat them the same as real wood logs. Artificial logs are usually made of sawdust and wax and have special burning properties. Read package directions, and follow them carefully. Do not stack artificial logs, use just one log at a time and never add an artificial log to a natural wood fire that is already burning. Do not poke artificial logs because the flaming wax could stick to the poker and drop onto the floor or carpet. Poking a log could also cause a flare-up.

Don't burn trash. Burning trash is not only toxic, it is also against the law. It can cause poisonous chemicals to go into the air, and into your lungs. Don't burn any of these: charcoal, coal, holiday greens, plastics (including plastic wrap, cups, plates, etc.), chemicals, wrapping paper, magazines, or any colored or coated papers (including newspaper inserts, junk mail, colored comics, etc.). Use of coal or charcoal in a fireplace can cause a danger of carbon monoxide build-up. Burning trash or wrappings in fireplace fires can generate deadly fumes from polystyrene foam and other coated materials. Colored inks contain lead and can produce toxic gases when burned. Flying paper embers could also

ignite the roof. Christmas tree greens can cause many sparks when burning and can cause a chimney fire.

Do not allow small children near the fireplace. Keep children away from the fire. Their clothing can easily ignite. Warn the entire family about this hazard. Warn children about the danger of fire, never let them play with fire, and review with them the "Stop-Drop-and Roll" drill they learned in school!

Do not overbuild a fire. Avoid "roaring" fires. They can start chimney fires and can lead to overheating of wall or roof materials.

Never leave a fire unattended. Make sure that the fire is completely out before going to bed or if you plan to leave the house.

Make sure you have basic fire safety equipment. Install a type ABC fire extinguisher near the fireplace. Install a screen that completely covers the fireplace opening to catch rolling logs or flying sparks, and arrange andirons so logs can't roll out. Equip your house with fire-warning devices including smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Have a spark arrester on top of your chimney to keep sparks from landing on the roof and causing a roof or attic fire. Keep the fireplace in good condition by repairing cracks in the flue lining, bricks and mortar.

Be sure no flammable materials hang down from or decorate your mantel. A spark from your fireplace could ignite these materials and cause a fire. Keep flammable and combustible materials such as carpets, pillows, furniture or papers, logs and kindling at least 3 feet away from the fireplace area. Be sure the Christmas tree is not close enough to be ignited by a spark. Keep the area near the fireplace clear of materials like papers, books, toys, etc.

Never use gasoline, charcoal lighter or other fuel to light or relight a fire because the vapors can explode. Never keep flammable fuels near a fire. Vapors can travel the length of a room and explode.

Never close your damper with hot ashes in the fireplace. A closed damper can help hot ashes build up heat, causing the fire to flare up and ignite your room. Open the damper before lighting the fire and keep it open until the ashes are cool. This will avert the build-up of poisonous gases, especially while the family is sleeping. Keep the damper set so the draft (flow of air) will remove all smoke and gases when the fireplace is on. Remember, too much air flow might let the fire get out of control.

Make sure you have good ventilation in the room. In tightly sealed homes, fireplace fires can suck poisonous carbon monoxide fumes from heaters. Smoke and harmful particles can also build up indoors; opening a window will help.

Be a good neighbor and notice your smoke. Burn dry, seasoned wood, and build small hot fires rather than large smoldering ones.

Save your fireplace or woodstove for special occasions. Fireplace fires are not a very efficient way to produce heat. The safest way to heat your home, and the cleanest for the air, is through a central heating system.

Use a gas log if you can, and NEVER burn wood in a fireplace that was designed for a gas log. Decorative fireplaces are not built to handle wood fires. Burning wood in one of these fireplaces is asking for trouble, and could create a dangerous situation.

Be sure that all ashes have thoroughly cooled before you dispose of them. Put ashes in a lidded metal container and store it outdoors on a solid concrete or asphalt surface away from any structures. Do not store the metal container on a wooden surface like a deck, or any other combustible surface. Add some water and stir it into the ashes if possible. Never use plastic or paper bags or cardboard boxes to carry ashes. After completely dead-cold-out, ashes make good fertilizer in gardens, flowerbeds, etc.