

Tips from Clean Sweep Chimney

Buying a new home?

Home inspectors really don't know anything about chimneys and flues and most aren't in a position to tell you whether problems exist or not. If a buyer has the chimney inspected prior to making an offer, the price can take into consideration whether or not work is needed, or the repairs can be made as a condition of sale. Either way, it'll probably save the buyer a considerable amount of money.

Here are some frequently asked questions from the *Chimney Safety Institute of America*:

- **Q. How often should I have my chimney cleaned?**

This a tougher question than it sounds. The simple answer is: The National Fire Protection Association Standard 211 says, "Chimneys, fireplaces, and vents shall be inspected at least once a year for soundness, freedom from deposits, and correct clearances. Cleaning, maintenance, and repairs shall be done if necessary." This is the national safety standard and is the correct way to approach the problem. It takes into account the fact that even if you don't use your chimney much, animals may build nests in the flue or there may be other types of deterioration that could make the chimney unsafe to use.

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A. The Chimney Safety Institute of America recommends that open masonry fireplaces should be cleaned at 1/4" of sooty buildup, and sooner if there is any glaze present in the system. Factory-built fireplaces should be cleaned when any appreciable buildup occurs. This is considered to be enough fuel buildup to cause a chimney fire capable of damaging the chimney or spreading to the home.



- **Q. I heat with gas. Should this chimney be checked too?**

A. Without a doubt! Although gas is generally a clean burning fuel, the chimney can become non-functional from bird nests or other debris blocking the flue. Modern furnaces can also cause many problems with the average flues intended to vent the older generation of furnaces. We suggest you check the areas on gas and carbon monoxide for more information.

- **Q. What level of Inspection do I need?**

A. Until recently, the scope of work performed in the inspection or evaluation of a fireplace, stove or other venting system was generally up to the discretion of the chimney service technician. Professional service technicians now have an industry standard that

removes much of that "discretion." The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has addressed the minimum chimney inspection standards in its latest publication (NFPA 211) concerning home heating appliances.

Inspections are now classified as Level 1 , Level 2 or Level 3 . Each level of inspection covers specific items depending on the individual appliance and venting system. Below is an explanation of the three levels of inspections and what services your chimney service technician should provide for each level.

Level 1 inspections - If your appliance or your venting system has not changed and you plan to use your system as you have in the past, then a Level 1 inspection is a minimum requirement. A Level 1 inspection is recommended for a chimney under continued service, under the same conditions, and with the continued use of the same appliance. In a Level 1 inspection, your chimney service technician should examine the readily accessible** portions of the chimney exterior, interior and accessible* portions of the appliance and the chimney connection. Your technician will be looking for the basic soundness of the chimney structure and flue as well as the basic appliance installation and connections. The technician will also verify the chimney is free of obstruction and combustible deposits.

Level 2 Inspections –A Level 2 inspection is required when any changes are made to the system. Changes can include a change in the fuel type, changes to the shape of, or material in, the flue (i.e. relining), or the replacement or addition of an appliance of a dissimilar type, input rating or efficiency. Additionally, a Level 2 inspection is required upon the sale or transfer of a property or after an operation malfunction or external event that is likely to have caused damage to the chimney. Building fires, chimney fires, seismic events as well as weather events are all indicators that this level of inspection is warranted. A Level 2 inspection is a more in-depth inspection than a Level 1 inspection.– When a Level 1 or Level 2 inspection suggests a hidden hazard and the evaluation cannot be performed without special tools to access concealed areas of the chimney or flue, a Level 3 inspection is recommended. A Level 3 inspection addresses the proper construction and the condition of concealed portions of the chimney structure and the flue. Removal or destruction, as necessary, of permanently attached portions of the chimney or building structure will be required for the completion of a Level 3 inspection. A Level 2 inspection includes everything in a Level 1 inspection, plus the accessible portions of the chimney exterior and interior including attics, crawl spaces and basements. It will address proper clearances from combustibles in accessible locations.

There are no specialty tools (i.e. demolition equipment) required to open doors, panels or coverings in performing a Level 2 inspection. A Level 2 inspection shall also include a visual inspection by video scanning or other means in order to examine the internal surfaces and joints of all flue liners incorporated within the chimney. No removal or destruction of permanently attached portions of the chimney or building structure or finish shall be required by a Level 2 inspection.

Level 3 Inspections

– A Level 3 inspection includes all the areas and items checked in a Level 1 and a Level 2 inspection, as well as the removal of certain components of the building or chimney where necessary. Removal of components (i.e., chimney crown, interior chimney wall) shall be required only when necessary to gain access to areas that are the subject of the inspection. When serious hazards are suspected, a Level 3 inspection may well be required to determine the condition of the chimney system.