

23,600 REASONS TO HAVE YOUR CHIMNEY SERVICED

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, reports that some 23,600 residential fires in the 50 states were related to solid fuel appliances and equipment in 1996. An additional 5,500 fires were attributed to chimneys and chimney connectors serving heating systems burning liquid and other fuels. As a result of these fires, 130 people died, 230 people were injured, and total property losses were set at more than \$184.4 million.

In addition there were a minimum of 119 deaths from carbon monoxide and at least 4,700 "injuries" reported for the same time frame, though most estimates range much higher.

The root cause of most of these losses is that most U.S. homeowners are unaware that chimneys are an integral part of a home heating system and that they require regular evaluation and maintenance. In a great many European countries - including Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Germany - chimney-fire damage statistics have been reduced to negligible numbers because national coalitions of government, insurance companies, fire and building officials, and chimney sweeps have developed tough regulations mandating regularly scheduled chimney inspections and cleaning.

The citizens of those countries understand the hazards of unmaintained chimneys, and their chimney sweeps are regular members of their home safety team.

Most homeowners in the U.S. and Canada, however, seem to have little working knowledge of chimney and venting systems. This situation is complicated by the fact that faults, damage and problems rarely visible to the casual observer. In fact, people who will quickly replace a faulty automobile exhaust system because of the hazard it presents will allow their home's exhaust system the chimney or vent - to go unchecked and unmaintained for years. The threat of chimney fires and unsafe indoor air quality conditions can be greatly reduced, perhaps even eliminated, if homeowners only understood that chimneys are active home operation systems which require regular maintenance.