The winter heating season is upon us, so it is a good time to remind people of the dangers of wood-burning appliances. More than one-third of Americans use fireplaces, wood stoves, and other fuel-fired appliances as primary heat sources in their homes. Unfortunately, many people are unaware of the fire risks when heating with wood and solid fuels.

Heating fires account for 36 percent of residential 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.

Remember these simple safety tips:

- Have your chimney or wood stove inspected and cleaned annually by a competent and qualified chimney specialist.
- Clear the area around the hearth of debris, decorations, and flammable materials.
- Leave glass doors open while burning a fire. Leaving the doors open ensures that the fire receives enough air to ensure complete combustion and keeps creosote from building up in the chimney.
- Close glass doors when the fire is out to keep air from the chimney opening from getting into the room. Most glass fireplace doors have a metal mesh screen which should be closed when the glass doors are open. This mesh screen helps keep embers from getting out of the fireplace area.
- Always use a metal mesh screen with fireplaces that do not have a glass fireplace door.
- Install stovepipe thermometers to help monitor flue temperatures.
- Keep air inlets on wood stoves open and never restrict air supply to fireplaces. Otherwise, you may cause creosote buildup that could lead to a chimney fire.
- Use fire-resistant materials on walls around wood stoves.

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