

FIREWISE NOTES

SWEEP THAT CHIMNEY!

Flue fires are a scary thing, and sadly are an all too common event in our area. They result from the natural buildup of creosote in the chimney of wood burning appliances. You can avoid becoming a victim of a flue fire by sweeping your chimney on a regular basis (once a year is recommended if you burn wood regularly).

LIMBING

You've heard the direction time and time again: *Remove the lower limbs on your trees to create a gap between the surface and the lowest tree limb.* It comes with the added comment that the gap needs to be at least six feet in height. Well, what about small trees and ornamentals?

OK, it would be devastating to an eight foot tall tree if you removed the lower six feet of limbs. However, you can and should remove the lower one-third of the branches on small trees – those that are less than 18 feet tall. Once they get taller than that, the six foot minimum gap applies.

The tree branch removal rules apply to ornamental tree species as well as our common conifers. Sequoias and blue spruces, for example, tend to produce and retain branches all the way down to the surface; if left in place, those branches create a very flammable fuel ladder that would allow a surface fire to rapidly progress into the tree crown. And a crown fire is the monster we are very definitely trying to avoid.

VENT SCREENING

With the onset of cooler weather our bats depart for warmer climates. That's a good time to check attic vents for proper screening. You should have metal screening over air vents, both for the attic and for any vents under the house as well. The screen openings should not exceed 1/4 inch in size (1/8 inch screening is even better), to keep embers from reaching the interior of your home ... and to keep bats out!

WATER DAMAGE

Just a reminder ... if you will be away from your home for more than a day or so, always **TURN OFF THE INTERIOR WATER SUPPLY** to avoid the ugly possibility of water damage due to a burst washing machine hose, a cracked fixture or a frozen water line. Winter or summer, it's just too easy for something to go wrong.

SHAKES, the trouble with ...

From an architectural perspective, wood shakes create an attractive appearance and texture. Unfortunately, wood shakes are also extremely flammable, susceptible to easy ignition from embers or open flame. That's why they are no longer allowed by Code in new construction in areas such as ours.

But what if you already have wood shake siding or roofing? Well, your fire insurance company may decide that your home is at greater risk than they are willing to deal with. More importantly, even if your insurance company looks the other way you are placing your family and yourself at increased risk by having this kind of exterior treatment. One experienced firefighter explains it this way: *Using wood shakes for roofing is a lot like stacking the roof with kindling.*

The most prudent action is to replace wood shakes with Class A (fire resistant) roofing at the first opportunity. Yes, reroofing is expensive ... but not nearly as expensive as losing the house to fire, and not nearly as troubling as placing loved ones in danger.

PROPANE TANKS

When the community inspection was done last year it was noticed that a number of propane tanks were in need of attention. In some cases combustible items or vegetation had been allowed to crowd around tanks. In other cases the regulator was exposed to damage rather than being under the metal bonnet atop the tank. So please take a look at your propane tank and check for any such issues.

Code requires that all combustible materials be removed within ten feet of a propane tank. This includes wood or plastic screening, shrubs, tall grass, firewood, scrap lumber and lawn furniture. We also need to give the regulator some protection from falling limbs or ice accumulation, which is why it needs to go under the metal bonnet. Your propane supplier will need to relocate the regulator if yours is exposed.

Winter weather brings up another issue with propane tanks. It is normal for a small amount of gas to escape from the regulator from time to time. Being heavier than air, any propane vapors sink to the ground and then dissipate. But when snow surrounds the tank (or covers it), the vapors may accumulate. The best solution is to keep the upper part of the tank, including the regulator area, clear of snow so that nothing blocks air movement. Keeping a pathway clear is also helpful, and your supplier will be grateful.