

News

Protect Yourself And Your Family From Carbon MonoXide (PDF)

Advice for Consumers

Consumers Union describes a basic chimney sweep and inspection procedure that "will last up to 90 minutes" and suggests that consumers should expect to pay \$150-\$300.

The Orange County, NY Department of Consumer Affairs recommends that "consumers try to avoid doing business via phone solicitations unless they are familiar or have done business with the solicitor previously." The Department also advises consumers to:

- Never pay for unauthorized work, which purportedly has been done.
- Never succumb to high-pressure tactics in paying the bill.
- Remember when they leave with your money, most likely you will never be able to locate them again.
- If possible try to record the license plate number of the vehicle.

The Chimney Safety Institute of America (CSIA) has published recommendations on how to hire a chimney sweep. The institute suggests asking:

- How long has the chimney sweeping company been in business?
- Does the company offer current references?
- Does the company have unresolved complaints filed within the city or state consumer protection agency or Better Business Bureau?
- Does the company or individual carry a valid business liability insurance policy to protect your home and furnishings against accidents?

Responsible Wood Burning Tips

The Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association offers the following tips on responsible wood burning and encourages people to utilize new wood burning technology and make changes in burning habits to reduce excessive wood smoke in an effort to help protect air quality:

Use EPA-Certified Wood Stoves and Fireplace Inserts: People with older wood stoves and fireplace inserts should consider changing out to EPA certified wood burning appliances. Wood stoves and fireplace inserts manufactured on or after July 1, 1990 -- or sold on or after July 1, 1992 -- are certified by the EPA to meet stringent emission standards. Replacing an older appliance with EPA certified wood burning technology can cut wood smoke emissions by up to 85 percent.

Upgrade Existing Traditional Fireplaces with EPA-Certified Fireplace Inserts: People with traditional fireplaces can reduce their emissions significantly by adding an EPA certified wood burning fireplace insert.

Add a Low Emission Fireplace or Masonry Heater: There are wood burning fireplaces sold today that are as clean burning as EPA certified appliances. A masonry heater is another wood burning appliances that produces minimal smoke and helps protect winter air quality.

Use Seasoned Firewood: Choosing the right firewood is critical whether or not a person uses new wood burning technology. Well seasoned firewood can make a big difference in the amount of smoke a fire produces.

Start a Fire with Fire Starter: Independent research indicates that using a fire starter to start a fire in a wood stove can cut particulate emissions by more than 69 percent.

Build Small, Hot Fires: Using small pieces of wood can help produce fires that burn hotter which results in less smoke.

Use Manufactured Firelogs: Made

from wax and sawdust or just sawdust, manufactured firelogs produce significantly less emissions than firewood. Wax and sawdust firelogs are for use in fireplaces only, while sawdust only firelogs can be burned in a fireplace, stove or fireplace insert. Schedule Regular Maintenance By Your Chimney Sweep: Keep your wood burning heating system in good working order with regular maintenance by a qualified professional chimney sweep. Regularly maintained EPA-certified wood stoves, which had heated homes for nearly ten years, performed like new in a recent study. Many chimney sweeps will be happy to schedule your future appointments a year or two in advance.

If you don't already have a good chimney sweep, ask around in your community for a company with a good reputation. Sweeps also demonstrate their competency through certification programs offered by the Chimney Safety Institute of America (CSIA), the Wood Education Technology Transfer (WETT) program in Canada, and some state chimney sweep organizations. A list of CSIA Certified Chimney Sweeps® is available online at www.csia.org.

More information about responsible wood burning is available from your chimney sweep or hearth specialty retailer and at www.hpba.org. A search engine to find a hearth specialty retailer is available on the website.

Scam Artists Smudge Chimney Sweeps' Reputation

By Jim Gillam

The apparently increasing prevalence of chimney scams is prompting warnings from government officials and consumer advocates.

“Whisk away any chimney sweep who uses scare tactics or shows up without the basics (a flashlight, brushes, and a special vacuum)” cautioned Consumers Union, publishers of Consumers Reports (www.consumerreports.org), last month, adding, “Also beware of those who offer low bids or excessive proposals.”

“Be wary if you get a call from anyone claiming to be from ‘your chimney cleaning company’ or ‘the chimney company,’ phrases which suggest it’s a business with which you have an established relationship,” wrote renowned consumer reporter Asa Aarons in the New York Daily News on October 23.

“The public should be aware that there has been a higher insurgence of fraudulent chimney services than any other home improvement services,” stated Lt. Michael Walsh of the Fairfield, NY Police Department on September 6, as reported in the Fairfield Citizen-News.

In October, police in New Haven, CT urged residents “not to allow anyone to enter their home or to do business with anyone who randomly knocks on the door.”

Certification

CSIA, Consumers Union and others refer consumers to the listing of CSIA Certified Chimney Sweeps® at www.csia.org. Choosing a company with certified sweeps may greatly increase a consumer’s chance of getting a good job done, but certification is not necessarily a guarantee of good workmanship. “The ‘not so reputable’ guy has now gotten CSIA certified, reducing the value of the credential,” wrote Bill Ryan (William Ryan & Son

Chimney, Landing, NJ) recently in a post to the Chimneys-L Internet discussion group.

False claims of certification present another difficulty. While current certification can be verified by checking the list on the website, this doesn't prevent some companies from claiming it without ever having had it, or continuing to claim expired certification, and using the official logo in their advertising and on their trucks.

"There are several logo violators in the phone book here," Ryan wrote, "but since you can't get an address, you can't file a complaint. These guys are not stupid."