



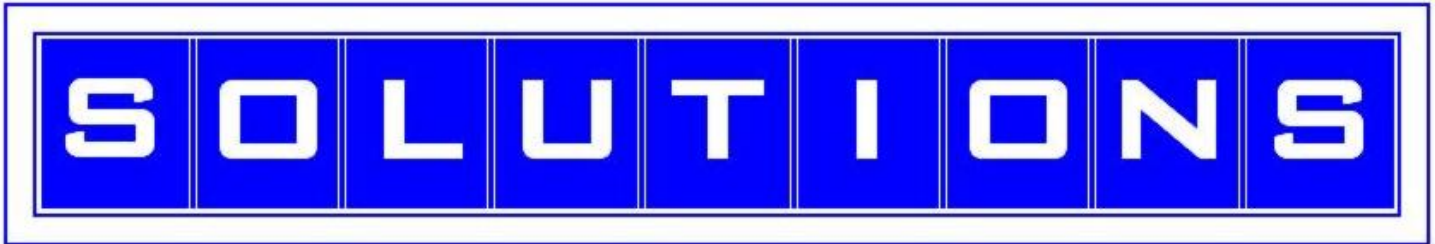
usa.gov



bellinspection.com



assurancecheck.net



Fireplaces and chimneys

For safety and liability reasons, I do not light a fire in any fireplace to check for proper operation, so the fireplace has not been checked for actual function in burning gas or solid fuels. Additionally, gas shutoff valves for gas fireplaces are not operated under any circumstances ([click here](#) for helpful information about why I do not operate gas shutoff valves).

Fireplaces and chimneys should be inspected on at least an annual basis, and more often depending on usage. Inspection of the fireplace during the property inspection is limited to visible and accessible sections only. The inner reaches of the flue or chimney throat are relatively inaccessible, so the view from the fireplace or chimney is not adequate to discover possible deficiencies or damage, even with a strong light. I do not dismantle rain caps and spark arrestors on the chimney top to look inside the chimney flue.

Manufactured fireplaces are usually built for use with natural gas. Although some manufacturers do build fireplaces for use with solid fuel, I can only verify approval for use with solid fuel if the manufacturer's installation instructions, approval statement, or use guidelines are available and state such approval. I am aware that many residents do burn solid fuel in the fireplace notwithstanding any manufacturer instructions to the contrary. If solid fuel is burned (and I emphatically recommend against it), please do not burn pine or the various manufactured logs (see Figure 1) that are found at many stores; dry hardwoods are better, understanding that I still emphatically recommend against burning any solid wood. Pine and manufactured logs typically burn hotter due to the sap present in the materials and typically will increase the soot build-up in the chimney.

Some newer fireplaces don't need a chimney. Instead they have what is called a direct vent. These vents typically are located at about three to five feet on exterior walls, which is unfortunate since they become very, very hot and have resulted in young children being seriously burned. Therefore, I recommend having a protective cage installed over the direct vent (see Figure 2).

Direct-vent fireplaces many times have a solid glass window that cannot be opened, and are operated by a wall switch. The glass window also becomes extremely hot during operation, so protecting the beautiful flames from young children crawling or walking up to the fireplace window simply has to be done. Condensation quite often forms on the glass front of direct-vent fireplaces, particularly during the first few minutes of operation. According to Mr. Dale Feb, Executive Director of the Fireplace

Investigation, Research, and Education Service (Moorpark, California), the white film is sulfuric acid. All fossil fuel produces sulfur during the combustion process, and when this sulfur is mixed with



Figure 1. One of several types of manufactured wood logs.

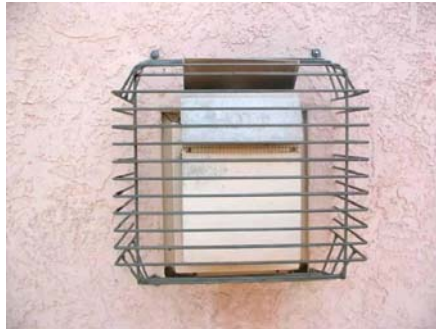


Figure 2. Wire cage installed over direct vent to protect against burns.

moisture in the air, sulfuric acid is created. The white film (acid) may permanently etch the glass and should be removed on a regular basis.

Inspection, testing, analysis, or functioning of free-standing fireplaces, sometimes called Franklin stoves, is not within the scope of a home inspection. Such fireplaces can be unique in their installation, operation, and maintenance. Ask the seller for any operation, maintenance, and installation guides that might be available. You might also be able to download such guides from the manufacturer's web site. Also ask for any receipts and warranty information.

Before you light a fire in your fireplace, check the spark arrestors on the chimney each and every time—yes, each and every time—particularly after high winds. Remember that we live in a state where wildfires are common. We also live in a state where liability for a fire rests with the person whose fireplace started the fire. So if the spark that started the fire can be traced to your home as the only one burning wood, you and your insurance company could be rebuilding a lot of homes and paying for the public cost of fighting the fire. It's simply not worth the risk, so I emphatically recommend burning natural gas or propane. If you need the romantic snap, crackle, and pop from a wood-burning fireplace, I suggest lighting the gas fireplace and pouring oneself a big bowl of milk and Rice Krispies.

The [National Fire Protection Association](#), the [Chimney Safety Institute of America](#), recommend that all fireplaces and chimneys receive a "Level II" inspection whenever real estate is sold or transferred. I agree with those distinguished associations, of course.

From the [Chimney Safety Institute of America](#):

Level II inspection

The addition of a new home heating appliance or a change in the type of fuel a homeowner is burning requires a Level II inspection. This type of inspection should also be completed upon the sale or transfer of a property or after an operating malfunction or external event that is likely to have caused damage to the chimney. The scope of a Level II inspection includes that of the Level I inspection plus the inspection of accessible portions of the attics, crawl spaces, and basements. It may also include a performance test, such as a smoke test or a pressure test, and possibly an interior chimney video inspection if recommended by the certified chimney sweep. [Click here](#) for helpful information on the other inspection levels of the [Chimney Safety Institute of America](#). You can also use their web site to find a certified chimney sweep.

Recommendations

- ✓ **Recommend evaluation of installation and condition of free-standing fireplaces by a qualified fireplace professional.**
- ✓ **Recommend consulting with seller concerning location of any manufacturer installation, user, safety, or operating guides for free-standing fireplaces or manufactured fireplaces.**
- ✓ **Recommend consulting with seller concerning most recent inspection and service/maintenance and further evaluation by a qualified fireplace professional if it cannot be proven that the fireplace has been inspected within the past twelve months. Recommend annual inspections by a qualified fireplace professional.**
- ✓ **Recommend not burning solid fuel in fireplaces due to fire hazards in San Diego County.**
- ✓ **Recommend ensuring that any direct vents located on lower exterior walls are protected against damage and touching.**
- ✓ **Recommend caution when fireplace is in use, particularly when children are present.**

If you have any questions about anything, simply [contact me](#).

Thank you for choosing Bell Inspection Service.