

Cost of Heating with Wood Might be Higher Than You Think

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Editor's Note: *This is an updated version of an article that was featured as an op-ed piece in the Topeka Capital-Journal in December 2000.*

Are you worried that your heating costs will go through the ceiling this winter? Is a wood-burning stove or fireplace you haven't used for years looking more and more like a way to cut your energy bills as the cold Kansas winter drags on and the cost of natural gas goes higher and higher?

You might want to think twice before you fire up an old wood-burner that has gone unused and unneeded over the last few winters. It might cost you more to operate than you expect – it might cost you your life.

Nine Kansans lost their lives in two fires, reported to the Kansas State Fire Marshal's Office in 2000, caused by alternate heat sources that burned. Six of the fatalities occurred in a Marion County farm home that was completely destroyed by the fire, and a family of three perished in a fire in their home in Humboldt. In both cases, an inspection by a professional would most likely have discovered the defects that caused the fires. And sadly, all of the lives would have probably still been saved if both homes had been equipped with smoke alarms.

There are four factors involved in burning wood for heat that can be deadly if residents ignore them. First off, you're building a fire inside your home that creates both heat and smoke. The wood-burning appliance you are using must contain the heat safely and be placed where radiant heat will not ignite flammable materials nearby.

Secondly, combustion creates deadly smoke and carbon monoxide. The appliance must efficiently vent these two silent killers out of the home. An inspection by an experienced professional can assure you that this will happen. Smoke kills more fire victims than the fire itself. The house fire in Humboldt was quickly extinguished by firefighters, and the only visible damage from the fire on the exterior of the house was a small hole burned in the roof.

Leaving a wood-burning appliance unattended and still burning is the third factor that has proved deadly in combination with the factors mentioned previously. Only a modern, self-contained appliance with dampening features in its firebox is safe to leave burning for the night. And even these modern appliances need regular flue cleaning and inspection to prevent chimney fires.

Lastly and most importantly, no home should be without at least one smoke alarm on every occupied level. It's been the law in Kansas since 1998. It is recommended that a smoke alarm be placed in every bedroom also. Battery-powered smoke alarms can cost as little as \$7, and firefighters have found them after extinguishing a fire, severely damaged but still sounding their life-saving alarm.

Remember, a wood-burning appliance might save some money on your heating bills during the winter. But for sure, following these tips will save your life.