



MR SWEEP CHIMNEYS & STOVES

THE CHIMNEY & STOVE SAFETY GUIDE

A Homeowner's Guide to Safer
Solid-Fuel Appliances

Warning signs • Carbon monoxide • Chimney problems • Fire safety • Maintenance

07380 805 327

Serving Staffordshire & surrounding areas

WELCOME TO MR SWEEP

A wood-burning or multi-fuel stove can bring warmth and comfort to your home, but like any solid-fuel appliance, it needs to be treated with respect.

Your chimney is responsible for carrying combustion gases safely away from your home.

Your stove produces heat at high temperatures.

Your fuel creates combustion products.

And your home needs the right ventilation and safety measures to allow everything to work correctly.

Most stove owners never experience a serious problem.

However, knowing the warning signs and carrying out sensible maintenance can make a big difference.

This guide has been produced by **Mr Sweep Chimneys & Stoves** to help homeowners across Staffordshire understand the main safety considerations associated with chimneys and solid-fuel appliances.

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1. YOUR CHIMNEY IS PART OF THE APPLIANCE

When people think about their stove, they often focus entirely on the appliance itself. But a stove is only one part of the system. The chimney or flue plays a critical role.

It needs to:

- Carry combustion gases away.
- Provide the appropriate draught.
- Remain sufficiently clear.
- Be suitable for the appliance.
- Be maintained appropriately.
- Remain safe for the building in which it is installed.

A problem with the chimney can affect how the stove operates.

2. WHY CHIMNEY SAFETY MATTERS

A chimney can develop problems for a number of reasons.

These can include:

- Soot accumulation.
- Tar-like deposits.
- Bird nesting.
- Debris.
- Structural deterioration.
- Water ingress.
- Damaged flue components.
- Poor installation.
- Incorrect appliance/flue combinations.
- Lack of maintenance.

Some problems are obvious.

Others aren't.

That's why regular maintenance and appropriate inspection are important.

3. CARBON MONOXIDE

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas that can be produced when carbon-based fuels don't burn correctly.

It is particularly dangerous because you cannot see it, smell it or taste it.

A faulty appliance, blocked flue or other problem can potentially allow combustion gases to enter a property.

Never rely on your senses

You may not know carbon monoxide is present without an appropriate alarm.

That's why carbon monoxide safety should be taken seriously in every home with a solid-fuel appliance.

4. CARBON MONOXIDE ALARMS

A suitable carbon monoxide alarm is an important safety device.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding:

- Position.
- Testing.
- Batteries.
- Replacement.
- Service life.

Check your alarm regularly

Don't assume that because the light is flashing, everything is fine.

Use the test function according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Replace old alarms

Carbon monoxide alarms have a limited service life.

Check the manufacturer's replacement recommendations.

5. WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CARBON MONOXIDE ALARM SOUNDS

Treat an alarm seriously.

If your carbon monoxide alarm activates:

1st Follow the manufacturer's emergency instructions.

2nd Get everyone to a safe place.

3rd If appropriate and safe to do so, stop using the appliance.

4th Seek appropriate emergency or professional assistance.

5th Do not resume using the appliance until the cause has been appropriately investigated.

If anyone is experiencing symptoms that could be associated with carbon monoxide exposure, seek urgent medical assistance.

6. SMOKE COMING INTO THE ROOM

Smoke should normally travel away from the appliance and into the chimney or flue.

If smoke starts entering the room, don't simply accept it as part of having a log burner.

Possible causes can include:

- Poor draw.
- Blockage.
- Incorrect operation.
- Cold chimney.
- Fuel problems.
- Ventilation issues.
- Appliance or flue problems.

What should you do?

Stop and investigate.

If smoke continues to enter the room, seek professional advice before continuing to use the appliance.

7. POOR CHIMNEY DRAW

The chimney's draught is important to the operation of a solid-fuel appliance.

Signs of poor draw can include:

- Difficulty lighting the fire.
- Fire struggling to establish.
- Smoke entering the room.
- Slow combustion.
- Excessive smoke.
- Stove behaving differently from normal.

There can be several causes.

Don't assume that poor draw simply means you need to open the air controls further.

If the problem persists, get it investigated.

8. EXCESSIVE SMOKE

A wood-burning stove may produce some visible exhaust depending on conditions and the stage of combustion.

However, persistent excessive smoke should not simply be ignored.

Consider:

- Is the wood sufficiently dry?
- Is the fire burning properly?
- Is there enough air?
- Is the stove overloaded?
- Is the chimney drawing correctly?
- Is the appliance being operated according to its instructions?

If the answer isn't obvious, seek professional advice.

9. CHIMNEY BLOCKAGES

A chimney can become blocked.

Possible causes include:

- Soot.
- Debris.

- Birds' nests.
- Leaves.
- Masonry.
- Deteriorated materials.
- Other foreign objects.

A blockage can interfere with the safe removal of combustion gases.

Never ignore suspected blockage

If you suspect that your chimney is blocked, don't simply light another fire to see what happens.

Seek appropriate professional advice.

10. BIRDS & NESTING MATERIAL

Chimneys can sometimes become attractive places for birds to nest.

Nesting material can create an obstruction.

You may notice:

- Twigs falling into the fireplace.
- Debris on the stove.
- Bird noises.
- Reduced draw.
- Smoke problems.
- Unusual smells.

If you suspect nesting material is present, don't use the appliance until the situation has been properly assessed.

Important

Some wild birds and their nests are protected by law.

Removal should be handled appropriately and legally.

11. SOOT, TAR & OTHER DEPOSITS

Solid-fuel combustion creates deposits.

The quantity and type can depend on:

- Fuel.
- Moisture content.
- Appliance.
- Operating temperature.
- Air supply.
- Chimney conditions.
- Frequency of use.

Poor combustion can contribute to increased deposits.

Heavy deposits are a warning

If a chimney contains unusually heavy deposits, your sweep may recommend further investigation into:

- Fuel quality.
- Stove operation.
- Chimney conditions.

- Appliance condition.
-

12. SIGNS OF A CHIMNEY FIRE

A chimney fire can be extremely serious.

Possible warning signs can include:

- A loud roaring or rushing sound.
- Vibrations.
- Excessive heat around the chimney.
- Sparks or flames visible from the chimney.
- Smoke or fumes entering the property.
- Cracking sounds.
- Unusual smells.

If you suspect a chimney fire

Treat it as an emergency.

Call **999** and ask for the Fire and Rescue Service.

Do not put yourself at risk attempting to investigate the chimney.

If it is safe to do so, follow appropriate fire-safety guidance and leave the property if necessary.

13. WHAT TO DO DURING A CHIMNEY FIRE

Your priority is people, not property.

If you believe there is a chimney fire:

CALL 999

Tell the operator you believe you have a chimney fire.

GET EVERYONE TO SAFETY

Leave the building if necessary.

DO NOT TAKE RISKS

Do not climb onto the roof.

Do not attempt to inspect the chimney from above.

Do not put yourself in danger.

FOLLOW FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE INSTRUCTIONS

They are trained to deal with these emergencies.

14. STOVE SAFETY

Your stove operates at extremely high temperatures.

Treat it accordingly.

Keep:

- Curtains.
- Furniture.
- Logs.
- Clothing.
- Children's toys.

- Paper.
- Decorations.

and other combustible materials safely away from the appliance.
Always follow the manufacturer's clearance requirements.

15. DAMAGED STOVE GLASS

Stove glass is designed to withstand high temperatures.
However, it can become damaged.

Check for:

- Cracks.
- Chips.
- Breakage.
- Severe damage.

Never ignore cracked glass

If the glass is damaged, follow the manufacturer's guidance and seek appropriate advice before continuing to use the appliance.

Never replace specialist stove glass with ordinary household glass.

16. DOOR SEALS & DOORS

Your stove door needs to close correctly.

Check:

- Door alignment.
- Door latch.
- Rope seal.
- Visible damage.
- Excessive wear.

A damaged or poorly sealing door can affect appliance operation.

If you're unsure whether the seal needs replacing, seek advice.

17. FIREBRICKS

Many stoves contain firebricks or similar heat-resistant components.

These can crack or deteriorate with use.

Some cracking may be acceptable depending on the manufacturer's design, while severe damage may require replacement.

Don't automatically replace everything

Check your manufacturer's guidance.

If a component is significantly damaged, seek appropriate advice.

18. OVERHEATING YOUR STOVE

More heat isn't always better.

Operating a stove beyond its recommended range can cause excessive temperatures and potentially damage components.

Signs of possible overheating can include:

- Unusual glowing of stove components.
- Excessive heat.
- Warping.
- Discolouration.
- Damage to components.

Always operate the stove within the manufacturer's recommended parameters.

19. COMBUSTIBLE MATERIALS

One of the simplest safety precautions is also one of the most important:

Keep combustible materials away from the stove.

This includes:

- Furniture.
- Curtains.
- Rugs.
- Logs.
- Kindling.
- Clothing.
- Decorations.
- Paper.
- Children's toys.

Follow the manufacturer's clearance requirements.

Never assume that a distance that looks safe is actually safe.

20. HEARTH SAFETY

The hearth is an important part of the installation.

It provides protection between the hot appliance/fire and surrounding combustible materials.

Never alter or reduce a hearth simply to make a stove fit more conveniently.

If you're considering changing your stove or fireplace, obtain appropriate advice before carrying out alterations.

21. VENTILATION

Some solid-fuel appliances require specific ventilation arrangements.

Ventilation may be necessary to provide combustion air.

It can also be important to the safe operation of the appliance.

Never simply block an air vent

If you have draught problems, don't solve them by covering or blocking a ventilation opening.

Seek appropriate professional advice.

22. CHILDREN & PETS

A stove can remain extremely hot for a considerable period.

Children and pets may not understand the danger.

Consider:

- Appropriate fireguards.
- Safe supervision.
- Keeping toys away from the appliance.
- Keeping pets away from the immediate area.
- Teaching children about the dangers of hot stoves.

Follow the appliance manufacturer's guidance regarding suitable protection.

23. CHIMNEY MAINTENANCE

Regular maintenance should form part of your home-care routine.

This can include:

- Appropriate chimney sweeping.
- Checking the appliance.
- Checking carbon monoxide alarms.
- Monitoring stove performance.
- Investigating changes.
- Addressing repairs promptly.

Don't wait for a problem

Preventative maintenance is generally easier than dealing with an emergency.

24. IF YOU'VE JUST MOVED HOUSE

If you've bought a house with an existing stove, don't assume that everything is safe simply because the previous owner used it.

Try to establish:

When was the chimney last swept?

What stove is installed?

Who installed it?

When was it installed?

Has the chimney been lined?

What fuel was used?

Are there installation documents?

Is there a carbon monoxide alarm?

Has the stove been serviced?

If you don't know the answers, consider getting appropriate professional advice before regular use.

25. BEFORE USING AN UNUSED CHIMNEY

A chimney that hasn't been used for years deserves particular attention.

Possible issues include:

- Nesting.
- Blockages.
- Damp.

- Structural deterioration.
- Debris.
- Deteriorated liners.
- Other changes since the chimney was last used.

Don't assume that an unused chimney is automatically safe.

Have it appropriately assessed and swept before use.

26. BEFORE INSTALLING A NEW STOVE

Before purchasing a stove, consider the complete installation.

You may need to assess:

- Appliance suitability.
- Heat output.
- Chimney.
- Flue.
- Ventilation.
- Hearth.
- Clearances.
- Fuel.
- Smoke Control Area requirements.

Get advice first

The cheapest stove isn't necessarily the cheapest installation.

Choosing an appliance that isn't suitable for the property can lead to additional expense later.

27. SMOKE CONTROL AREAS

Smoke Control Areas have additional restrictions concerning domestic solid-fuel burning.

These can affect:

- Appliances.
- Fuels.
- Smoke emissions.
- How appliances are operated.

The rules vary according to location.

Always check your property

Don't assume that the rules applying to a property in one Staffordshire town automatically apply to another.

28. STAFFORDSHIRE HOMEOWNERS

Staffordshire includes several local authority areas and different types of housing.

There are also areas where Smoke Control restrictions apply.

For example, **Stoke-on-Trent has Smoke Control Areas.**

Other parts of Staffordshire have different arrangements.

If you're unsure about the rules applying to your home, check with the relevant local authority or government guidance.

MR SWEEP TIP

Your exact property matters.

Check the rules applying to your own address before purchasing or using an appliance.

29. YOUR ANNUAL SAFETY CHECKLIST

STOVE

Glass checked.

Door checked.

Door seal checked.

Firebricks checked.

Stove body checked.

Manufacturer's instructions available.

CHIMNEY

Sweep arranged when due.

No known blockage.

No unexplained change in draw.

No unusual smells.

No unexplained smoke entering room.

SAFETY

Carbon monoxide alarm tested.

Smoke alarms tested.

Fire protection equipment checked as appropriate.

Combustible materials kept safely away.

Children and pets protected from hot surfaces.

30. EMERGENCY WARNING SIGNS

Stop using the appliance and seek appropriate professional or emergency assistance if you experience:

SERIOUS WARNING SIGNS

- Carbon monoxide alarm activation.
- Smoke entering the room.
- Suspected chimney blockage.
- Suspected chimney fire.
- Flames or sparks coming from the chimney.
- Serious damage to the stove.
- Cracked or broken stove glass.
- Strong unexplained combustion smells.
- Sudden severe changes in stove operation.
- Excessive overheating.

Never take unnecessary risks

If you're worried about immediate danger, get people to safety and contact the appropriate emergency service.

31. THE MR SWEEP GOLDEN RULES

1. RESPECT THE HEAT

A stove can become extremely hot.

2. KEEP COMBUSTIBLES AWAY

Follow the manufacturer's clearances.

3. NEVER IGNORE SMOKE

Smoke entering your room needs investigation.

4. TAKE CARBON MONOXIDE SERIOUSLY

You cannot see or smell it.

5. TEST YOUR ALARM

Check it regularly.

6. KEEP YOUR CHIMNEY MAINTAINED

Regular sweeping is an important part of stove ownership.

7. DON'T USE A BLOCKED CHIMNEY

Get it checked first.

8. DON'T BURN UNSUITABLE MATERIALS

Never use your stove as a waste incinerator.

9. DON'T OVERHEAT YOUR STOVE

Follow the manufacturer's operating instructions.

10. IF IN DOUBT, STOP AND ASK

It's better to ask a professional than take a risk.

32. QUICK EMERGENCY REFERENCE

CARBON MONOXIDE ALARM SOUNDS

Get everyone to safety.

Follow the alarm manufacturer's instructions and seek appropriate assistance.

SMOKE ENTERS THE ROOM

Stop and investigate.

Don't simply continue using the appliance.

SUSPECTED CHIMNEY FIRE

CALL 999

Get everyone to safety and follow Fire and Rescue Service instructions.

SUSPECTED BLOCKAGE

DON'T LIGHT THE FIRE

Arrange an appropriate inspection/sweep.

DAMAGED STOVE

STOP USING IT IF APPROPRIATE

Seek advice before continuing to use the appliance.

A FINAL WORD FROM MR SWEEP

A wood-burning stove can be one of the most enjoyable features in a home.

The key to enjoying it safely is simple:

Maintain it.

Use it correctly.

Burn appropriate fuel.

Keep your chimney clear.

Check your alarms.

Pay attention to changes.

And never ignore something that doesn't seem right.

Your chimney is an important part of your home's heating system.

Look after it, and don't be afraid to ask for professional advice when you need it.

MR SWEEP CHIMNEYS & STOVES

PROFESSIONAL CHIMNEY SWEEPING

STAFFORDSHIRE & SURROUNDING AREAS

If you're concerned about your chimney, stove or flue, or your chimney is due for its regular sweep, **Mr Sweep Chimneys & Stoves** is here to help.

CLEAN CHIMNEY

SAFE STOVE

PEACE OF MIND

BOOK YOUR CHIMNEY SWEEP

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IMPORTANT INFORMATION

This guide is provided for general homeowner information only.

It does not replace professional advice, appliance manufacturer's instructions, Building Regulations, government guidance, local-authority requirements, fire-safety advice or emergency-service instructions.

Requirements can vary depending on the appliance, chimney, flue, fuel and location.

Smoke Control Area rules can vary between different parts of Staffordshire and may change over time.

Always check the current requirements applying to your property.

Where an appliance, chimney or flue requires specialist inspection, testing, installation, repair or other work, seek advice from an appropriately qualified professional.

In an emergency, contact the appropriate emergency service.

Mr Sweep Chimneys & Stoves accepts no responsibility for decisions made solely on the basis of this general guide.

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