

# HOME BUILDING - CONSTRUCTION - REMODELING

## Chimney maintenance a part of home safety

As temperatures drop and thoughts once again turn to lighting fires and sitting down with a good book, it's important to revisit chimney maintenance. Even though chimneys do not require daily upkeep, regular maintenance efforts help chimneys operate safely and prevent deaths and injuries while protecting homes from fire.

Various problems can arise when chimneys are not well maintained. Such problems include chimney fires, carbon monoxide poisoning and early failure of the chimney and heating sources that the chimney vents.

Carbon monoxide can be scary, as it is virtually invisible without a proper detector. The National Vital Statistics System says that, in 2015, 393 deaths resulted from unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning in the United States. When carbon monoxide is breathed in, it builds up quickly and combines with the blood, reducing the blood's ability to carry oxygen. The Canada Safety Council says that body tissue and cells can't function without oxygen.

Chimney fires are another potential byproduct of poor chimney maintenance. The Chimney Safety Institute of America notes that chimneys expel the byproducts of combustion, including smoke, water vapor, gases, unburned wood particles, hydrocarbon, tar fog, and assorted minerals, which can condense on the inside of the chimney flue. The residue, called creosote, is highly combustible. With the right conditions, a chimney fire can occur.

To avoid chimney fires and other risks, take these precautions, courtesy of CSIA, HomeAdvisor and Popular Mechanics.

- Have chimneys inspected annually and properly cleaned by a professional chimney technician.
- Make sure tree branches and other obstacles are cleared away from the top of the chimney.
- Use seasoned hardwoods that have been split for several months to a year. "Green" wood creates more creosote.
- The top-down method of building a fire produces less smoke. This means using larger pieces of wood on the bottom and the smallest twigs and kindling at the top. The fire will burn from the top and down, igniting the wood beneath as it goes.



- Put a cap on the chimney to keep out rain, snow and small animals.
- Keep fires small; otherwise, the intense heat may damage bricks and mortar in the chimney. Repair any damage promptly before lighting another fire.
- Open the damper and fireplace doors so that air supply flows freely and can vent the smoke promptly, reducing residence time in the flue; otherwise, creosote can form.
- Install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms throughout the home and routinely check the batteries.

Learn more about chimney maintenance and find a certified chimney sweep at [www.csia.org](http://www.csia.org).

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## 5 ways to make homes safer

Injuries that occur around the home contribute to millions of medical visits and tens of thousands of fatalities each year. Falls account for the largest percentage of home accidents, with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reporting that around 30,000 fall-related fatalities occur each year in the United States. Many home accidents are entirely preventable when proper caution is exercised.

As homeowners prepare for home-improvement projects, improving safety inside and outside the home should be a priority.

### 1. Improve lighting

One of the easiest ways to reduce the risk of falls is to improve lighting around the home. The National Institutes of Health state that adequate lighting is important at entrances to the home, stairways, hallways, and other frequently traversed areas. Make sure lighting fixtures are using the highest wattage light bulb allowed. Artificial lighting sources become even more vital in fall and autumn, when natural light is less abundant in a home. In addition, install lighting outdoors by the front door, over the garage and where garbage pails are stored to facilitate safe passage.

### 2. Eliminate slick surfaces

Improving traction around the house also can minimize falls. Throw rugs and runners can be made more secure with nonslip rubber backings. Bath rugs can reduce slipping on wet surfaces in the bathroom. Also, nonslip mats can be used inside of showers and bathtubs.

Use shoe trays to reduce puddling from melting snow or rain runoff in entryways. Mop up spills quickly, and consider the use of matte- or textured-finished flooring to improve stability underfoot.

Promptly remove snow and ice from driveways



Stairs should be free of clutter and have sturdy railings.

and walkways. For those who live in cold climates, heated concrete can help melt precipitation before it accumulates.

### 3. Make needed repairs

Repair loose floorboards and pull carpet taut if it has started to stretch out. Address cracks outdoors and ensure that patio stones, bricks and pavers are secure and level to reduce tripping hazards. Fix areas of the landscape where water may pool and freeze, creating potential hazards.

### 4. Declutter all spaces

Remove unnecessary items and furniture from rooms to free up more space to get around. Be sure there are no obstructions in walkways, entryways and near doors. Keep staircases clear at all times.

### 5. Invest in assistive devices

Handrails, grab bars, nonslip stair treads, and many other devices can

make homes safer for people of all ages and abilities. Outfit cabinets and closets with organizers that put frequently used items within easy reach. A sturdy step stool can reduce the risk of injury while reaching for items stored on high shelves.

Taking measures to reduce the risk of falling around the home is a worthwhile home improvement project.

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- Keep exterior doors closed.
- Limit use of space heaters. They cure a symptom, not the problem.

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- Install and use a programmable thermostat.
- Seal exterior cracks and holes.
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**2 Check that your insulation is correctly installed**

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**3 Replace old, inefficient HVAC units**

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**6 Reduce air pressure**

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**7 Install shade screens**

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**8 Recycle your old refrigerator or freezer in the garage**

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**9 Reduce Vampire power**

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## Potential indicators of roof trouble

With regard to home repairs, homeowners may be able to delay some projects until the weather permits or they find room in their budgets. But other areas, including the roof, may demand immediate action.

Few homeowners give the roofs of their homes much thought until a problem arises. But learning to recognize potential indicators of roof trouble can help homeowners prevent potentially drastic situations down the road.

- **Light:** Homeowners with attics in their homes can inspect the ceilings inside the attic for signs of holes or leaks. Light peering through the top of the house indicates a hole or leak, as does stains or streaks on the ceiling.

- **Worn shingles:** Shingles should lie flat against the roof, so any that appear to be buckling or turning up are damaged and in need of repair. A single damaged shingle does not require a full roof replacement, but inspect all the shingles nonetheless. Another indicator of shingle problems can be found when cleaning downspouts or gutters. If the gutters and downspouts contain lots of shingle granules, the roof may soon need to be replaced.

- **Moss:** Moss on a rooftop may give a home character, but that added character is costly. Shady areas of a roof can be susceptible to the growth of moss and fungi because moisture can be trapped in such areas. If possible, remove moss or fungi from a roof with a stiff brush or hire a professional to do the job instead. Moss may come back even after brushing it off, so homeowners should keep an eye on areas of their roofs that get little sunlight. In addition, trapped moisture can be very harmful to a roof, so it may be wise to exercise caution and have roofs with mold or fungi growths inspected.

- **Age:** Another indicator of roof trouble may be the age of the roof. Even if there are no visible signs of damage, homeowners whose roofs have some years under their belt may want to consider replacing them. Asphalt shingle roofs typically have life expectancies of 20 to 25 years, while roofs installed over existing layers of shingles may need to be replaced after 20 years.

Recognizing minor roof damage before it escalates into a larger problem can save homeowners substantial amounts of money.



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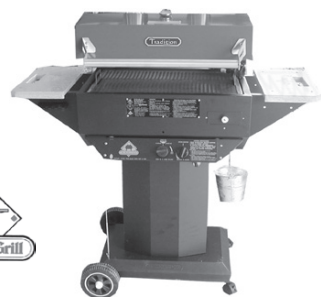


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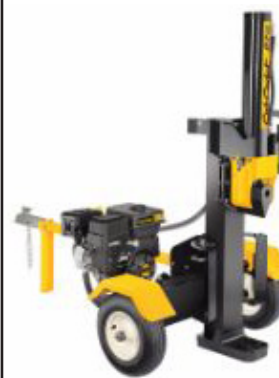
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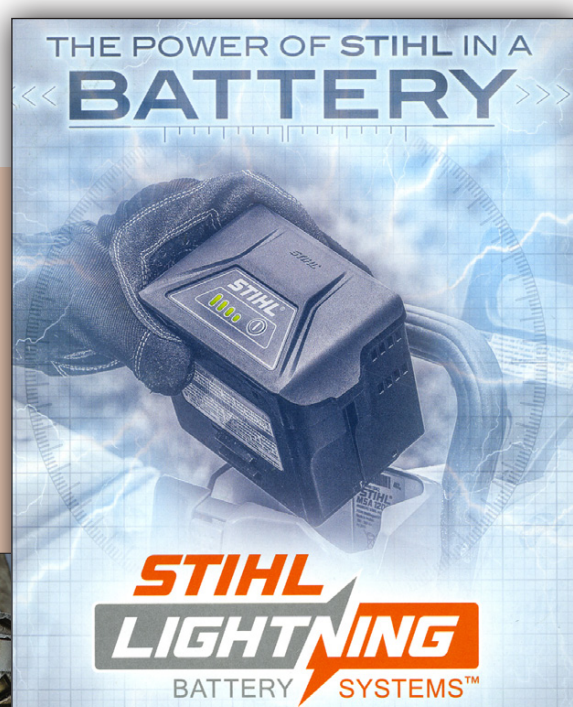
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