

## Where there's smoke: 4 Myths about Chimneys

A wood-burning fireplace is the most inviting way to heat. Reduce the risk of chimney problems by installing a chimney cap to keep out rain, animals, and debris, and beware of these maintenance misconceptions:

**Myth:** Unused chimneys don't need inspecting

**Reality:** Cracks can develop and weaken the structure, and obstructions like bird nests can build up. An annual inspection allows you to fix small problems before they become big.

**Myth:** Focus on structural issues.

**Reality:** Blockages or a buildup of creosote can cause fires and carbon-monoxide poisoning. Dirty chimneys cause most chimney and flue fires, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

**Myth:** Expect to pay \$40 for basic inspection and cleaning.

**Reality:** Fraud alert! Once in your home, a cheap sweep is likely to say there's damage that will cost thoughts to fix. A basic inspection and sweeping usually costs \$150 to \$300, the nonprofit Chimney Safety Institute of America says.

**Myth:** Some good sweeps take 10 minutes.

**Reality:** Even a basic, level-1 inspection and sweeping takes 60 to 90 minutes.. the sweep should ask about past problems. He'll turn off fuel-burning appliances that vent into any of the chimney's flues and will place drop cloths in the work area. He'll inspect the chimney and flashing. He'll clean the chimney and tidy the firebox, noting problems. A level-2 inspection, \$225 to \$250 and 90 to 120 minutes is apt when the chimney has been structurally changed. Level 3 could be costlier and might even involve demolition.

Source: Consumer Reports, page 9, January 2010.