

# Wood & Pellet Stove Safety

With the increase in oil and gas prices, more Mainers are turning to alternative means of heating their homes for the winter. Wood stove sales have skyrocketed, along with wood pellet stove purchases. With the increase in sales and installations, it is important to understand the responsibility of owning and operating wood stoves, pellet stoves, and fireplaces safely and efficiently.

## GENERAL SAFETY TIPS

- Make sure all smoke detectors are in working order.
- Install a Carbon Monoxide monitor about 10 feet away from the wood or pellet stove.
- Never use gasoline, kerosene, charcoal starter, or propane torches to light the fire. Never use charcoal in a stove or fireplace. It produces an excessive amount of carbon monoxide.
- Have your (certified) wood or pellet stove be professionally installed to ensure safety. A certified technician understands and carries out all manufacturer and Building Codes.
- Keep all flammable objects, including dry wood, far away from the wood or pellet stove. Do not place household items on the pellet stove.

## WOOD BURNING STOVE SAFETY AND EFFICIENCY

Property installed wood stoves burn wood efficiently, safely, and effectively, allowing only a thin wisp of smoke to be seen coming from the chimney.

### Using your Wood Stove Safely

- You should NEVER smell smoke in your home. The smell of smoke indicates that a wood stove is not operating efficiently.
- **The EPA** recommends having the wood stove, chimney, and vents professionally inspected and cleaned yearly, **however**, with wood being seasoned at different periods of time during the year, especially here in Maine, it is difficult to find fully dried wood. During warmer winter and spring like days when fires burn slower, creosote tends to build up more quickly. It is recommended to keep a small mirror at the chimney clean-out / inspection door. **It is best to inspect the chimney and all stove pipes weekly.**

### Safe Wood Burning Practices

- Keep all flammable household items far away from the wood stove, including dry wood.
- Do not use wax or sawdust logs in the wood stove, unless the logs are made from 100 percent compressed sawdust.
- Keep wood stove doors closed unless loading or stoking the fire.

### Practical Tips for Building a Wood Stove Fire

- Season wood outdoors through a hot dry summer for at least six months before burning. Properly seasoned wood sounds hollow when smacked against another piece of wood.

- Stack wood off the ground, ( pallets if possible ), and stacked neatly, with the top covered.
- Open dampers before starting a fire.
- Start fires with clean newspaper and dry kindling.
- Do not ‘overstart’ the fire with too many newspapers or too much kindling – overstarting may ignite any creosote in the chimney, resulting in a chimney fire.
- Burn hot bright fires. Let the fire burn down to the coals and rake it toward the air inlet to create a mound. Do not spread the coals flat.
- Burn the fire hot for at least fifteen minutes, twice a day, to reduce the amount of creosote in the chimney.
- Reload the stove with at least three pieces of wood each time, on and behind the mound of hot coals. Avoid adding one log at a time.
- Regularly remove ashes (once a week during heating season) from the wood stove into a **metal container with a cover**, and store outdoors away from buildings.

### **Pellet Stove Safety**

The heating efficiency, eco-friendliness, and overall price for wood pellet stoves have convinced many buyers to go this route. In some areas, sales have outgrown the availability of this heating alternative. Like any other stove, a pellet stove requires time and attention on a regular basis. Here are a few considerations to keep in mind.

- First-generation pellet stoves may have kinks that will be corrected in successive models. Choose a brand that has proven itself over the years.
- Let the manufacturer’s operations manual serve as a guide in cleaning, maintaining, and troubleshooting the pellet stove.
- The pellets are made of sawdust, and the byproduct of this burning is carbon monoxide. **Install a CO detector within 10 feet of the pellet stove.** Make sure that the smoke detectors in the household are in working order.
- Solid sterno or fire starting blocks which are sold for fireplaces do not work well with wood pellet stoves. To get a wood pellet stove to light, use the manufacturer’s recommended liquid accelerant designed to mix with the pellets.
- Never put any accelerant into a hot burn pot with active coals. If your fire goes out, allow it to cool before re-lighting it.

### **Check your Homeowners Insurance coverage:**

Most people have found, unfortunately after a fire, their homeowners insurance will not cover fires due to wood stoves. Most Insurance companies require oil, electric or other sources of “ Primary heat” , with wood used only as a “ Backup “ heat source.

### **SOURCES:**

<http://www.epa.gov/woodstoves/basic.html>

[http://maine.gov/dps/fmo/documents/2005Woodburningguide\\_000.pdf](http://maine.gov/dps/fmo/documents/2005Woodburningguide_000.pdf)