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Servicing and Maintaining Wood Heaters and Flues to Reduce the Fire Risk

SERVICE YOUR WOOD HEATER REGULARLY

The Victorian Building Authority reminds consumers it is important to have wood heaters serviced regularly. Routine maintenance ensures that appliances operate efficiently and do not contribute to conditions that pose a fire hazard. Wood heaters and flues should be serviced annually by an appropriately registered or licensed mechanical services plumbing practitioner.

UNMAINTAINED WOOD HEATERS ARE A FIRE HAZARD

Not having a wood heater and its flue serviced and maintained regularly increases the risk of it starting a fire. Research by the Coroners Prevention Unit found that over a 10-year period (2003-2013) there were at least 48 fires in Victoria where a wood heater flue was the likely ignition source. This included a March 2012 fire in regional Victoria which claimed the lives of two small children.



Creosote build-up in a flue (Australian Home Heating Association)

WHAT ISSUES DOES SERVICING ADDRESS?

Regular servicing of a wood heater and its flue system will address two key fire hazard risk areas:

- It will remove any creosote that has accumulated in the heater or flue. Creosote forms when the gases from burning wood condense on their way out of the flue, leaving a tar-like material. The substance can build up quickly and block the flue, leading to inefficient heater operation. Because creosote is highly combustible it can catch fire, making it a common source of wood heater-related fires.
- A check of the flue system will help ensure it is free of defects and flammable materials such as grass, small twigs and other debris that may be the result of birds nesting in the flue or surrounding chimney cavity. The intense heat generated in flues when the heater is being used can cause this debris to catch fire and burn.

In addition to reducing the fire risk, regular servicing of a wood heater will ensure that it operates as efficiently as possible.

Externally, it is also important to keep combustible materials – such as overhanging tree branches – well clear of flues.

TIPS FOR OPERATING YOUR WOOD HEATER

In addition to regular servicing, there are numerous things to remember when operating a wood heater that will assist in minimising wood smoke and allow the appliance to operate at maximum efficiency:

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for lighting, fuelling and operating the wood heater
- Use paper or kindling wood to get the fire started
- Only use dry, seasoned wood
- Arrange the wood so plenty of air can circulate around all sides
- Always leave the air control open for at least 20 minutes after starting or refuelling the fire
- Do not overfill the heater or try to burn logs that are too large.



A modern, free standing wood heater

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON:

Efficient operation of wood heaters

- Visit the [Environment Protection Authority Victoria website](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au) www.epa.vic.gov.au

Wood heaters generally

- Visit the [Australian Home Heating Association Inc website](http://www.homeheat.com.au) www.homeheat.com.au