It’s time for a pre-winter service for your wood heater and flue

With winter approaching, the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) is reminding Victorians that wood heaters and flues must be installed by a licensed mechanical services plumber and should be serviced regularly.

In a new information sheet, titled ‘Servicing and maintaining wood heaters and flues to reduce the fire risk’, the VBA recommends homeowners get these appliances serviced each year by a plumber who is licensed or registered to do the job.

A wood heater and flue that isn’t serviced and maintained regularly is at a greater risk of starting a building fire. In March 2012, a fire in regional Victoria tragically claimed the lives of two children. The coroner found that the wood heater flue was the likely source of the fire.

VBA Director of Technical and Regulation Jarrod Edwards said regular servicing also helps wood heaters to run as efficiently as possible.

“Servicing regularly can reduce the risk of a house fire by removing creosote, a highly combustible tar-like material that can accumulate and block the flue. As well as preventing the heater from operating efficiently, creosote is also a common source of wood heater-related fires,” Mr Edwards said.

“Checking the flue system will help make sure there are no problems with it and no flammable materials, such as grass, small twigs and other debris in or around the flue. The intense heat generated in flues when the heater is being used can cause this debris to catch fire.”

TIPS FOR OPERATING YOUR WOOD HEATER

As well as getting your heater and flue regularly serviced, Mr Edwards advised that there is a range of other steps you can take to help reduce the risk of a house fire and improve the efficiency of your wood heater:

• 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 flow 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.
• Keep combustible materials, such as overhanging tree branches, well clear of flues.

MORE INFORMATION

• To view the information sheet, visit the VBA’s website at www.vba.vic.gov.au
• For more information about wood heaters, visit the Australian Home Heating Association Inc website at www.homeheat.com.au
• To find out how you can help your heater to run more efficiently, visit the Environment Protection Authority Victoria website at www.epa.vic.gov.au

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