



## **Fire Safety for the Winter Months**

By Rick Bunzel

Mountain View Property Inspection

When winter arrives most of us settle down in front of our fireplace for its warmth and security. But is disaster lurking within your home? The first alert may be when the smoke detector shrieks its warning at 4:00 a.m. If you don't have a working smoke detector, you may not wake up at all.

As a home inspector and firefighter with 20 years experience, I am often criticized for being picky about small, insignificant items such as poor wiring, lack of smoke detectors, fire stops and window sizing that really didn't mean very much. When fire strikes many times these items make the difference between life and death. You can protect your home and your family from fire with these simple, common sense safety tips:

**Cooking:** Look while you cook--unattended cooking is the leading cause of kitchen fires. Wear tight-fitting or rolled-up sleeves when cooking and keep all combustible materials a safe distance from the stove. Cooking or smoking while under the influence of alcohol can be deadly. Keep a close eye on any drinkers in your household and make sure all cigarettes are properly extinguished and the stove is off before going to bed.

**Candles:** Keep candles in a sturdy holder away from children, pets and combustible materials. Snuff them out before leaving a room.

**Fireplace:** Wood burning fireplaces need regular cleaning and inspection. Depending on use, homeowners should have the chimney swept and inspected every two years. The fireplace should have screen or glass doors to prevent embers from escaping.

**Space heaters:** Keep portable heaters at least 2 feet away from anything that can burn--including you. Don't use your heaters to dry shoes or clothes.

**Heating appliances:** Remember to have your furnace inspected each year by a licensed technician. Your fireplace chimney should also be cleaned and inspected annually to prevent problems that may cause a build-up of carbon monoxide. A carbon monoxide alarm will alert you to the presence of this deadly gas.

**Smoke detectors:** Over 90% of fire deaths occur in residential dwellings between 11pm-6am when occupants are asleep. Smoke detectors should be installed on every level of your home and outside all sleeping areas. Test your detector regularly and change the batteries at least once a year. Most fire departments promote this practice during Fire Prevention week in October or with Daylight Savings time

Rick Bunzel has 20 years experience as a firefighter in New Jersey and California. He is currently a member of the Boulder Rural Fire Department. If you have questions or comments, Rick Bunzel can be contacted at Mountain View Property Inspections @ 303-443-9063 or [Rickbunzel@aol.com](mailto:Rickbunzel@aol.com)