

Make a clean sweep of fire safety



Chimney sweep Ken Hyde has never been busier with people realising the dangers of blocked chimneys and flues.

The image of a chimney sweep conjures up thoughts of turn of the century England and *Mary Poppins*. But those sooty little men with brushes bigger than themselves are by no means a thing of the past.

In fact, right now, the trade is thriving.

Despite living in a world of high technology, the humble chimney sweep is still of vital importance.

The increased popularity of solid fuel stoves has given a second lease of life to the trade.

And with winter almost upon us and our thoughts starting to turn to cosy wood fires, now is the time to think of our chimneys — and more importantly chimney sweeps.

A general guide for home owners to test whether their flue needs cleaning is to tap the side of it. If soot and other grime can be heard falling into the firebox then the flue needs cleaning.

Figures released by the fire services reveal that more than one in 10 house fires are caused by chimney and flue fires.

A combination of faulty installation of solid fuel heating systems and poor maintenance are the causes of the majority of fires which break out in flues and chimneys in private homes.

Many home owners ignore basic safety and maintenance procedures which result in some wood fires becoming potential 'death traps.'

Winston Haby, the chief officer of the Metropolitan Fire Service, said the increasing number of fires of this type was a major problem faced by the fire fighting authorities.

He warned people to check their chimneys and flues for birds' nests and a build up of soot before they use them this winter.

Residents should also ensure that there is not a build-up of dust and fluff under the heater or behind the heat shields.

Mr Haby warned that to ensure an early warning in the case of a malfunction, all homes should be fitted with at least one smoke detector.