

December 22, 2010

NEWS RELEASE FROM THE OFFICE OF:

**DENNIS SMITH
COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT
GREGG COUNTY**

Fireplace Safety

This winter has started out rather mild, but January and February always seem to be our coldest winter months, make it the ideal season to use the fireplace. Nothing is as warm and cozy on a cold winter night as a nice hot fire in the fireplace. But there are several precautions that must be taken to keep a fireplace operating safely.

Chimneys should be inspected annually and cleaned as necessary by a professional. This is especially important if you use your fireplace on a regular basis. Having the chimney cleaned reduces the risk of chimney fires and carbon monoxide poisonings due to creosote buildup or obstructions in the chimneys. A certified chimney sweep can often perform maintenance on your wood stove and other needed repairs.

If you are installing a factory-made fireplace, it should not be located near any combustible materials. It should also have adequate heat and flame barriers.

Keep the tops of chimneys clear of tree limbs and other debris.

Install a chimney cap to keep debris, birds and animals out of the chimney.

Always open the damper before lighting the fire and keep it open until the ashes are cool. This will avert the build-up of potential poisonous gases. Often a nearby window should be opened when starting the fire to increase the draft up the chimney.

Never use gasoline, charcoal lighter or other fuel to light or relight a fire because the vapors can explode. Never keep flammable fuels near a fire.

Choose well-seasoned wood that has been dried for a minimum of six months to a year and stored properly.

Do not use coal or charcoal in a fireplace because of the danger of carbon monoxide build-up. Do not burn trash or gift wrap in the fireplace because some of the materials could generate deadly fumes. Paper embers could also ignite leaves on the roof.

If you use artificial logs, be sure to read the label carefully. Do not treat artificial logs like real logs.

Do not overload the fireplace. Large fires can lead to overheating of wall or roof materials, particularly if the fireplace is constructed of metal.

Always use a screen around open fireplaces to keep sparks from flying out and to protect children and adults from accidental clothing ignition.

Keep all flammable materials a safe distance from the fire.

Do not place the Christmas tree near the fire.

Farmer's Tax Guides

We have a new supply of the 2010 Farmer's Tax Guides available in the Gregg County Extension office. This publication explains how the federal tax laws apply to farming. This publication can be used as a guide to figure your taxes and complete your farm tax return. The Farmer's Tax Guide and other income tax publications and forms are available also on the Internal Revenue Service web site at <http://www.irs.gov/>.

Dennis Smith can be contacted at the Gregg County Extension Office by e-mail at dg-smith@tamu.edu or telephone at: 903-236-8429.

Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin.