

High home heating costs

Things to consider before dusting off that old wood stove

Used stoves are being snapped up at auctions and old stoves that were mothballed years ago are being dusted off and set up to burn again. If you are taking urgent action to control your heating costs this winter, here are some things to consider before hooking up that old stove.

Any steel box you can build a fire in will make heat, but it will also make smoke, waste wood and it could put your family at risk of house fire. A stove that is more than 20 years old won't be able to burn the wood efficiently, meaning smoke will be released into the chimney where it can stick as creosote or go outside as air pollution. Newer stoves, built since 1990 and having Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) certification for low smoke emissions, can burn up to one-third less wood for the same amount of heat. One-third of a winter's wood supply is a lot of saved money and work.

Wood stoves must be installed correctly to be safe and reliable heaters. The guidelines for safe installation are not necessarily obvious, so you'll need some reliable advice. You can get good advice from someone who has taken courses and has professional certification from Wood Energy Technical Training (WETT). Ask your local stove dealer if they have WETT certification.

You will want to make sure that your chimney is suitable and safe. The chimney is important, not just because it is the route the exhaust takes to outdoors, but because it creates the draft that draws in combustion air and causes the exhaust to flow up the chimney to outside. Hire a WETT certified chimney sweep to clean and inspect your chimney.

Your insurance company will be very interested in your wood heating plans because they want you to do it safely. Before hooking up that old stove, contact your insurance agent or broker to find out if there are restrictions. Most insurance companies have strict rules on the kinds of stoves they'll accept in houses they insure, and almost all will ask that you have the completed installation inspected by a WETT certified professional.

You can't heat efficiently if your firewood is too wet. To dry properly, firewood needs to be cut, split and stacked in the open where it is exposed to sun and wind. Hardwoods like maple and oak take at least a year to dry enough to burn. Softer woods like poplar, birch, pine and spruce can be ready to burn in the fall if they are split and stacked in early spring.

Before you hook up an old stove, visit your nearest wood stove store and look inside the new stoves to see how different they are from the one you plan to install. Get advice from a WETT certified professional and check with your insurance agent.

You can be successful with wood heating, but you need to do some preparation first. You'll feel safer and more secure if you know the job is done right.

For more information visit the Wood Heat Organization web site at: www.woodheat.org and find your local WETT certified technician or sweep at www.wettinc.ca

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*The **Wood Heat Policy Institute** (WHPI) supports the public interest in wood heating and advocates for the responsible use of this important renewable energy resource. WHPI is a source of credible information and analysis of wood heating related issues. It also supports government and non-governmental organizations in policy development related to wood heating. The Institute is an outreach initiative of the Wood Heat Organization (WHO). WHO has provided independent, non-commercial advice to householders interested in the use of wood heat since 1996.*