



Burn Wise

Consumers - Best Burn Practices

A properly installed, correctly used wood-burning appliance should be smoke free. If you see or smell smoke that means you may have a problem. Practice the following guidelines to Burn Wise in your appliance and reduce smoke inside and outside your home.

Practical Tips for Building a Fire

Once your wood-burning appliance is properly installed, building an effective fire requires good firewood (using the right wood in the right amount) and good fire building practices. The following practical steps will help you obtain the best efficiency from your wood stove or fireplace.

- Season wood outdoors through the summer for at least 6 months before burning it. Properly seasoned wood is darker, has cracks in the end grain, and sounds hollow when smacked against another piece of wood.
- Wood burns best when the moisture content is less than 20 percent. You can purchase a wood moisture meter to test the moisture content of your wood before you burn it.
- Store wood outdoors, stacked neatly off the ground with the top covered.
- Burn only dry, well-seasoned wood that has been split properly.
- Start fires with newspaper and dry kindling or consider having a professional install a natural gas or propane log lighter in your open fireplace.
- Burn hot fires.
- To maintain proper airflow, regularly remove ashes from your wood-burning appliance into a metal container with a cover and store outdoors.

Items You Should Never Burn in Your Appliance

- **Never** burn household garbage or cardboard. Plastics, foam and the colored ink on magazines, boxes, and wrappers produce harmful chemicals when burned. They may also damage your wood-burning appliance.
- **Never** burn coated, painted, or pressure-treated wood because it releases toxic chemicals when burned.
- **Never** burn ocean driftwood, plywood, particle board, or any wood with glue on or in it. They all release toxic chemicals when burned.
- **Never** burn wet, rotted, diseased, or moldy wood.

Safe Wood-burning Practices

Once your EPA certified or qualified wood-burning appliance is properly installed, follow these guidelines for safe operation:

- Keep all flammable household items—drapes, furniture, newspapers, and books—far away from the appliance.
- Start fires only with newspaper and dry kindling. Never start a fire with gasoline, kerosene, charcoal starter, or a propane torch.
- Do not burn wet or green (unseasoned) logs.
- Do not use logs made from wax and sawdust in your wood stove or fireplace insert – they are made for open hearth fireplaces. If you use manufactured logs, choose those made from 100 percent compressed sawdust.
- Build hot fires. For most appliances, a smoldering fire is not a safe or efficient fire.
- Keep the doors of your wood-burning appliance closed unless loading or stoking the live fire. Harmful chemicals, like carbon monoxide, can be released into your home.
- Regularly remove ashes from your wood-burning appliance into a metal container with a cover. Store the container of ashes outdoors on a cement or brick slab (not on a wood deck or near wood).
- Keep a fire extinguisher handy.
- Remember to check your local [air quality forecast](#) before you burn.

Money Saving Tips

Look into getting your name on a list with local tree cutters who will deliver wood to your home. This saves them from traveling to the landfill and paying dumping fees. It also reduces landfill dumping. Plus, you may end up with discounted firewood.

You can reduce overall heating needs and heating bills by improving the insulation in your home; caulking around windows, doors, and pipes to seal air gaps; and adding weather-stripping to doors and windows. [EPA's ENERGY STAR Home Improvement](#) provides information on home sealing.

There are also federal tax credits that may be available. For more information, visit the [EPA's Energy Star web site](#) to learn about a possible \$300 tax credit for the purchase of a wood or pellet stove.

Install and Maintain a Smoke Alarm

Each year in the United States, about 3,000 people lose their lives in residential fires – and mostly from inhalation of smoke and toxic gases, not as a result of burns. Properly installed and maintained smoke alarms in the home are considered one of the best and least expensive means of providing an early warning of a potentially deadly fire.

If you burn wood in your home, even occasionally, EPA recommends you install a smoke alarm to alert you and your family in the event of a fire. To be effective, smoke alarms must be in the proper location and tested regularly. Batteries should be replaced regularly, too. More information is available from [FireSafety.gov](#).

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Dry Seasoned Wood



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Quick Tips to Burn Wise

[Burn Wise Tip Sheet \(PDF\)](#) (1pg, 67k)