



EPHRATA FIRE DEPARTMENT

Position Statement

Chimney Cleaning Devices and Consumer Products

February 2008

Aligned with the position of the Washington Public Fire Educators, the Ephrata Fire Department believes the use of chimney sweeping logs, flare devices, soot devils and similar products is not an adequate substitute for mechanical chimney cleaning and inspection because they do not provide for the same level of protection to the chimney system.

BACKGROUND Each time you burn wood in your fireplace or woodstove, tar and creosote are formed and over time, will build up on the inside of your chimney. This build-up is highly flammable and can ignite causing a chimney fire. To prevent chimney fires, the fire service has long recommended having your chimney cleaned and inspected annually by a licensed professional. But now, a number of new products on the market (chimney sweeping logs, flare devices, soot devils, etc.) have many citizens wondering whether an annual mechanical cleaning remains necessary. Many of these products are claimed to reduce deposits of tar and creosote thus reducing the risk of chimney fires.

The Ephrata Fire Department is concerned about these claims. While we won't dispute what these products will do, we feel that it's vital to address what they won't do. If these products manage to loosen creosote so it flakes off the flue walls as the advertisements claim, where does that creosote go? It either catches fire as it flakes off and increases the potential for a chimney fire through the intense burning, or it falls to the bottom and collects on the smoke shelf, thus causing a future hazard.

EFD agrees with THE CHIMNEY SAFETY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA's statement: *"The use of these products alone is not an adequate substitute for mechanical chimney cleaning and inspection because it does not provide for the same level of protection to the chimney system."* (THE CHIMNEY SAFETY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA is a non-profit, educational institution focused on the prevention of chimney and venting hazards).

EFD believes that the safest and most effective chimney maintenance is achieved through annual inspections and mechanical sweeping. The basic task of a chimney sweep is to clean chimneys. The cleaning process includes:

- 1) removing the hazard of accumulated and highly combustible creosote produced by burning wood and wood products,
- 2) eliminating the build-up of soot in coal- and oil-fired systems, and
- 3) removing bird and animal nests, leaves and other debris that may create a hazard by blocking the flow of emissions from a home heating appliance.

In addition to the cleaning, chimney inspections often reveal hidden problems within the structure that could be potentially dangerous such as breaks or breaches in the flue. Mechanical sweeping of chimneys not only removes layers of creosote from surfaces, it also eliminates the resulting debris from the chimney, fireplace, or woodstove.

Many chimneys are not constructed in a straight path from the firebox to the outside. If chimney-cleaning products perform as claimed and cause debris in the chimney to fall, that debris must still be removed from the smoke shelf, baffle, catalytic combustor, or offset in order to ensure a safe and properly functioning chimney.