



Topic: - Thatch Safety

Are you aware of the Fire that occurred in your area?



On Tuesday 2nd March crews were dispatched to reports of a fire at a cottage on Colliery Road Brereton.

Everyone at the property was safe on arrival, the fire involved the thatch roof which was believed to have started as a result of embers from the chimney due to the use of log burner in the property.

It was a very difficult blaze which caused some considerable damage to the property

Safety Tips

Wood burning and multi-fuelled stoves are not recommended for use in thatched buildings.

Stoves present a greater risk of fire in thatch properties than other forms of heating **including** traditional open fires.

It is accepted that the efficiency advantages of wood burning and multi-fuel stoves are attractive to householders and this guidance has been produced to assist them in reducing the risk of fire where such stoves are used.

Safety precautions

Chimney height

Increasing the distance between the top of the chimney and the thatch will result in fewer sparks reaching the thatch and will reduce the risk of fire.

This can be done by:

- raising the height of the chimney
- adding a chimney pot
- reducing the thickness of the thatch.

Tar and soot

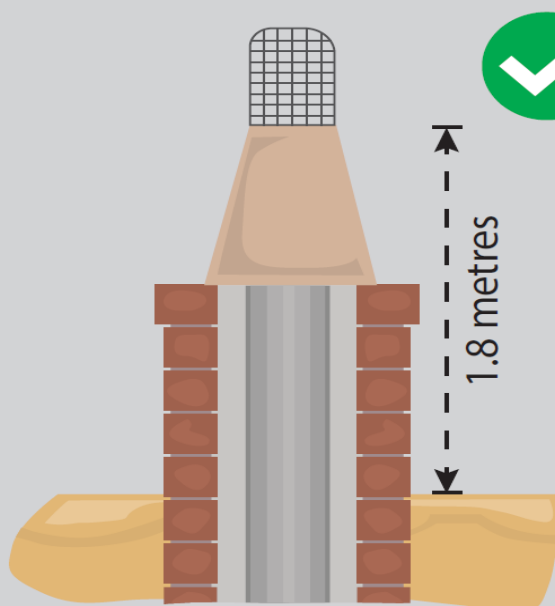
This build-up can also lead to chimney fires. The extreme flue gas temperatures and burning material falling from the chimney top present a fire risk.

Chimney fires

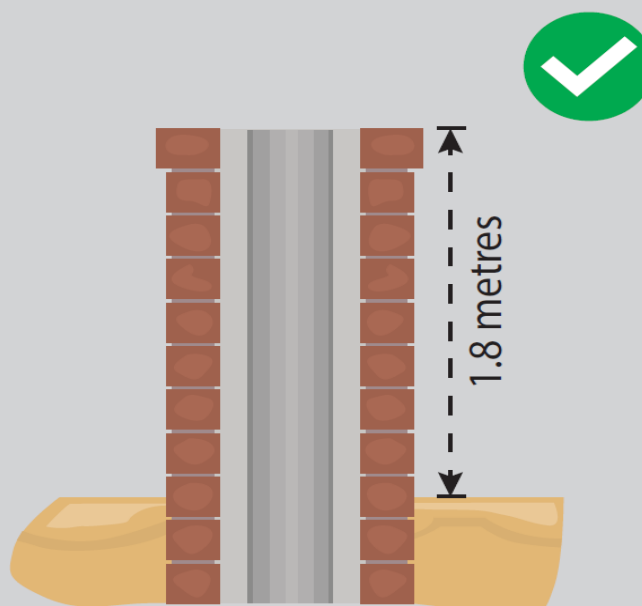
Chimney fires may ignite the fabric of the building, damage the chimney liner and brickwork, and may set fire to the thatch.



What you can do to help



Make sure the top of the chimney pots are at least 1.8 metres above the thatch.

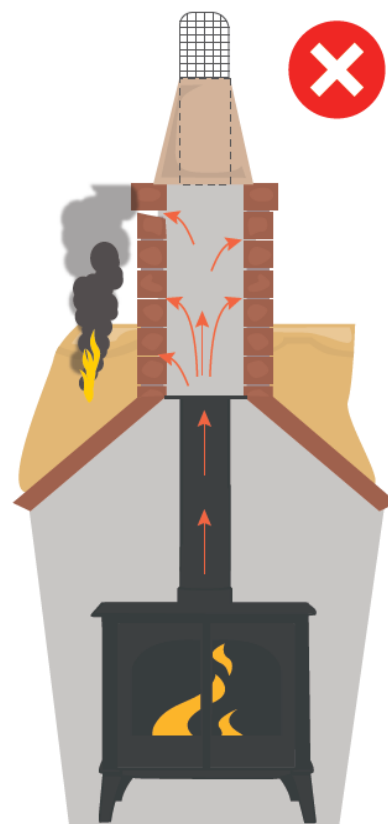
**Line your chimney**

Using a chimney liner prevents hot fire gasses and sparks from reaching the thatch. All stove chimneys should be lined, ideally with twin-walled insulated rigid stainless liner. Where this is not possible a quality twin-walled flexible stainless liner should be used in its place.

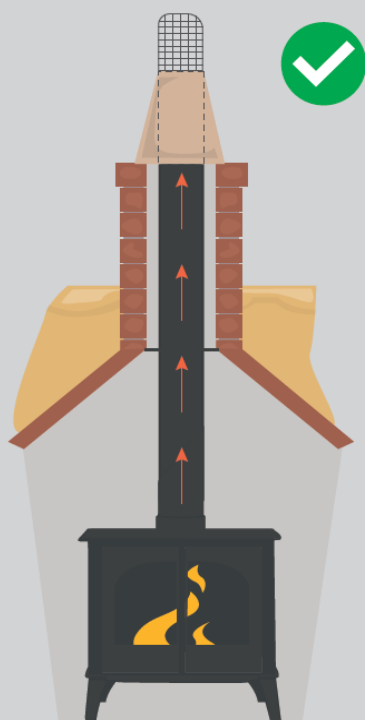
Lighting and refuelling the fire

Stove controls are set to maximum ventilation when you first light or refuel your fire. Watch the fire until you've adjusted the controls to their usual settings. Use firelighters and kindling instead of paper and card to light your fire and reduce the risk of sparks catching the thatch alight.

Never use a wood burning stove as an incinerator for paperwork and rubbish.



Sparks can reach the thatch on an unlined chimney



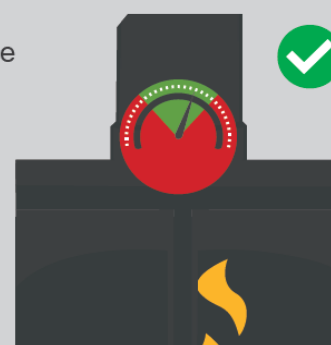
Chimney liners prevent hot fire gasses and sparks from reaching the thatch

Fit a stove pipe temperature gauge

Stove temperature monitoring is essential to understanding if the stove is working within its safe limits.

Operating at too low a temperature risks coating the chimney with soot and tars which may later lead to chimney fires. Operating at too high a temperature risks sparks catching the thatch alight.

All members of the household should be aware of the meaning of the gauge sections and know how to control the stove to maintain an ideal temperature.



Use a temperature gauge to make sure it is operating within safe limits

Seasoned wood

It is important that if you are burning wood that it is dry and well-seasoned, this means that it has 20% or less moisture content.

A well-seasoned log will have drying out splits in the ends. You can also use a moisture gauge, which are available from hardware stores, to tell you exactly how much moisture your wood contains.

It is a good idea to buy your wood at the beginning of the summer and store it outside where it can be exposed to the wind and sun and protected from direct rainfall.

Burning wet, newly-felled or coniferous wood can cause tar or creosote to form in the wood burner and chimney which can be hazardous.





Faulty chimneys

Old or poorly maintained chimneys can deteriorate to the point where smoke and hot gases can escape from the chimney into the upper rooms, the roof space, or directly into the thatch.

Vital signs to look out for that may indicate a problem:

- staining of the plasterwork or wallpaper around the chimney breast
- black or brown localised deposits on the chimney or in the roof space
- soot on cobwebs in the loft.

Chimneys built before the 1960s (as is the case of most thatched homes) are likely to be single brick thickness and unlined.

The protective parging or roughcast plasterwork will crumble and disintegrate with age.

Due to the age of many thatched properties, built before the introduction of Building Regulations, the construction of chimneys can be highly unconventional.

Period homes often have timber lintels over the fireplace and timber joists built into chimney stacks. These can be exposed to scorching when the protective layer inside the chimney disintegrates.

Chimney maintenance

Chimneys should be checked or surveyed to ensure that they are structurally sound, well-maintained, and able to cope with the demands of modern heating appliances.

The following key points should be considered:

- make sure that chimneys are regularly swept by an experienced and qualified chimney sweep who should be able to identify potential problems at an early stage
- it may be useful to keep evidence of sweeping, for your insurance company
- if a chimney lining has been installed it should be regularly inspected, especially when the main fuel is wood, as tar deposits are highly combustible and corrosive
- a qualified chimney engineer can identify and help address potential hazards

- only a competent chimney engineer who understands the special risks associated with thatched properties should install any lining.





Safety devices

Spark arrestors

We **do not** recommend spark arrestors to be installed but if already fitted it is essential that they are regularly cleaned and maintained by a qualified chimney sweep. They may be useful in preventing birds from nesting in the chimney.

Fit a bird guard

Fitting a bird guard will prevent birds from nesting in a chimney and will allow the flue to function to its full efficiency. As with spark arrestors it is important that they are regularly cleaned and maintained.

Heat sensors

Various systems are available where heat detectors connected to a control panel are inserted into the thatch around the chimney.

They are designed to give an audible early warning of potential overheating of the thatch so that preventable measures can be taken.

Installation costs and an annual maintenance programme need to be considered, together with a plan of what action needs to be taken when the alarm is given.

Contractors

If you are having any work done on your house **do not** allow contractors to carry out 'hot works' such as plumbing or paint stripping. Make sure the contractors are fully aware of the potential risk of a thatch fire.

Bonfires

It is always good practice to limit the number and location of any bonfires to reduce the risk of fire to your property.

It is also a good idea to discuss this with any neighbours who have a bonfire near your property.

Water supplies

Assess the water supplies to your property. Consider having an outside tap with enough hose pipe to reach around your house including the roof.

This will help you control any small fires you discover. Only tackle a fire if it is safe to do so.

Find out the location of your local fire hydrants.

This will save time for fire crews responding to your property in the event of a fire.

Insurance

Thatched homes are, by their nature, a non-standard insurance risk which means that establishing your insurance need and specifically calculating the cost of rebuilding thatch properties can be complex.

Speak to an insurance specialist and make sure your property is adequately covered.



Fitting your smoke alarm

- A smoke alarm should be fitted on each level of your property.
- The ideal position is on the ceiling, in the middle of a room, hallway and landing, so you can hear the alarm throughout your home.
- The alarm should be fitted at least 30cm away from a wall or light fitting.
- Do not put alarms in or near kitchens or bathrooms where smoke or steam can set them off by accident.
- Follow the instructions supplied with the alarm and keep the manufacturer's instructions for future reference.
- For thatch properties we also recommend that a smoke alarm be installed in the roof space for early detection.



We need your eyes to assist us in keeping our community safe, please share our safety tips with your friends and family and should you have concerns with regard to any points in this safety flash please contact your local prevent team.

For further advice please contact our Prevent Team on 01785 898719 or via email: -

WSDGPreventTeam@staffordshirefire.gov.uk.

Please remember not to attempt to tackle a fire please call 999 and ask for the Fire Service.