



# Media Release

## Poorly maintained chimneys spark fire service warning

5 May 2023

As the winter chill sets in, South Australia's Fire Services remind the public to make sure their chimneys and flues are cleaned to avoid dangerous home heating fires.

In 2022, the South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) and SA Country Fire Service (CFS) responded to over 60 house fires caused by home heating.

Of the fires directly linked to chimneys and fireplaces, almost 70% were caused by ineffective cleaning and maintenance.

MFS Community Engagement Officer Phil Evans said the increase in cold nights is prompting people to use open fires and combustion heaters to keep warm.

"Firefighters are responding to fires caused by poorly maintained chimneys and flues which heightens the risk of dangerous house fires, putting lives at risk.

"Anyone with a solid fuel fire, regardless of whether it is an open fire or a slow combustion heater, should have their flues, chimneys and fireplaces checked and cleaned by a qualified person at least once a year to prevent a dangerous build-up of flammable material inside the chimney," said MFS Community Engagement Officer Phil Evans.

The MFS strongly discourages the use of resinous or green wood, which can cause a build-up of soot and flammable materials, and of treated wood which emits poisonous fumes.

MFS Community Engagement Officer Phil Evans also highlighted the importance of correctly disposing hot coals and ashes to avoid a fire spreading.

"Hot ashes must never be placed directly into household bins, plastic buckets or council bins. Have a metal bucket which you use only for ash and let the ash cool completely before disposing of it."

The MFS recommends the following safety tips to keep warm safely this winter:

- Flues, chimneys and fireplaces should be cleaned once a year to prevent a build-up of flammable material and ensure your combustion heater or open fire functions correctly.
- Heating equipment should be installed and serviced by a qualified tradesperson in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
- Always use a full-size fire screen in front of open fires to prevent sparks or embers coming into contact with carpet, furniture or other combustible items.

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- Keep flammable items well clear from any fires or heaters. Clearance from clothes, bedding, curtains and other combustibles should ideally be two metres. Two giant, adult steps is a good rule of thumb.
- Combustion heaters must have the door latched shut when in use.
- Never use flammable liquids to start the fire.
- Never burn wood that has been chemically treated.
- Never place hot ashes in household bins, plastic buckets or council bins. Have a metal bucket which you use only for ash. Let the ash cool completely before disposing of it.
- Always keep children at a safe distance from the fire or combustion heater to reduce the chance of them stumbling or falling into the fire.
- Keep fire lighting tools (matches, lighters and stove lighters) well out of reach and out of sight of children.
- Ensure all flames are out prior to leaving the house and close vents on combustion heaters.
- Ensure all solid wood fires and associated flues are installed in accordance with the Australian Standard AS/NZS 2918:2018 Domestic Solid Fuel Burning Appliances – Installation

**For media enquiries please telephone the MFS Media Line on (08) 8204 3770**