

Proper Use of Your Fireplace

If you are fortunate enough to have an apartment with a working fireplace, it's important that you review these guidelines before using it to ensure a safe and efficient fire.

Before you light a fire

1. **Keep combustible materials, fluids, and gases away from the fireplace opening.** In addition, the entire fireplace area, including the mantel, should be clear of flammable objects. Rugs, stacks of paper, and magazines are especially vulnerable to sparks.
2. **Use the fireplace grate (log rack) grate for an evenly burning fire.** It allows oxygen to get underneath the wood to fuel the flames and provides a space between wood and the fireplace floor for embers to fall without smothering the fire. Place the grate near the back wall of your fireplace for good circulation and heat radiation. Be sure it is at least 6" away from the front opening.
3. **Make sure that the damper is open and check the draft.** The damper is a device that seals your fireplace shut when it is not in use. This is necessary so that heated air from your home will not escape up the chimney and be wasted. It must be opened before lighting a fire.
 - To locate and open the damper, first be sure that your fireplace is completely cool. The damper is located in the throat of the fireplace chimney, just above the firebox (fireplace opening). Using a flashlight may help you more easily find it. In most cases, the damper handle is located slightly right or left from the center top of the firebox. Many look like a small, looped metal handle.
 - Grasp the handle of the damper and pull it right to left or left to right depending on the damper's initial position. If you are still looking at the chimney damper, you should see the damper move. Note the handle's position when the chimney damper is completely closed or completely open. In most cases, when the damper handle is pulled completely to the left it is completely closed. Likewise, when the damper handle is positioned to the right of center it is completely open.
 - Once open, you can check the damper draft by lighting a small roll of newspaper and placing it into the fireplace or by striking a match and extinguishing it directly in front of the fireplace. Watch where the smoke goes. If the damper is opened properly, the smoke should flow into the fireplace and go up the chimney. This may also warm the chimney; a cold chimney does not draft well. If the smoke does not go up the chimney, the damper isn't completely open and you should try opening it again.

Preparing the logs and lighting the fire

WARNING -- NEVER use lighter fluid, kerosene, gasoline, lantern fuel, or other flammable liquids to start or "freshen up" a fire. They are highly explosive and flammable. If necessary, add a little non-colored paper or a roll of newspaper onto the kindling.

1. **Prepare the ashes, kindling, and tinder.**
 - Open the glass enclosure doors and mesh curtain.
 - If possible, have a one- to two-inch bed of ash under the grate, leaving at least one to two inches of space between the top of the ashes and the bottom of the grate.
 - Purchase kindling or prepare your own by splitting soft wood into small pieces, some about 1 ¼ inches in diameter and a few from 1-2 inches in diameter.
 - Place tinder under the fireplace grate. Tinder can be a piece of newspaper or plain paper rolled into a cone and placed pointing to the back of the fireplace. You may also use cedar twigs, birch bark, dry pine needles, or hemlock for tinder.
 - Then place about one inch of the kindling under the grate.
2. **Select three or more well-seasoned, medium-sized (8-10 inches in diameter) hardwood logs, such as oak, birch, ash, hickory, or maple.** Do not use pine logs for your fire. While small pieces of soft pine make good kindling, pine logs burn too fast, create lots of smoke, and build up creosote in the chimney. Creosote is a tar-like brown or black substance, which has an unpleasant, acrid odor. Excessive buildup of creosote can cause chimney fires.

- Place a moderate sized log in the rear of the fireplace, close to, but not touching the wall.
 - Arrange a second log at the front of the grate.
 - Fill the space between with a smaller log or kindling.
 - Finally, place a smaller log diagonally across the top of the first two logs, forming a "Z" between all three logs.
3. **Use long matches or a fireplace lighter to ignite the tinder and kindling.** The fire will soon spread to the logs.
 4. **Close the mesh curtain and keep it closed while the fire is burning to protect the surroundings from flying sparks.**
 - Open the mesh curtain only to add more logs, if desired, after a good bed of coals has formed (about twenty minutes).
 - Do not close the glass doors when burning a fire, and do not overload the fireplace. Excessive temperatures can cause discoloration, frame warping, and glass breakage.
 - Never take burning logs out of the fireplace. Doing so can burn floors in front of the hearth, scorch the mantelpiece, damage the glass fireplace doors if they come into with them, and start a fire in your unit.
 - Do not burn trash in the fireplace as it can lead to the formation of creosote.
 - No matter how much protection you might have for your fireplace, it is never a good idea to leave your apartment, even for a quick errand, with a fire still burning.

When the fire is done

1. **Fires should be allowed to burn out naturally.** Leave the screen in place and the damper open until the fire has completely died.
2. **Once the fire is completely out, be sure to close the damper.** Otherwise, you will lose all your heat through the chimney, as you would through an open window. Unless you have a fire burning, keep the damper closed at all times.
 - On cold winter nights, it is tempting to extinguish the fire with water so that the damper can be closed, or to close the damper prematurely to preserve heat during the night. DON'T. The excess smoke created will back up into the apartment, causing great discomfort, and possibly set off the smoke detector. Water may also crack the brick inside the fireplace, weakening its structure and making it unsafe.
 - If smoke accidentally does back up into the apartment, DO NOT OPEN THE DOOR TO THE COMMON HALLWAY TO VENTILATE THE APARTMENT. This will set off the building alarm, which can only be shut off by the fire department. To avoid such false alarms, open the damper, open windows if necessary, and fan the smoke away from the smoke detector.

Cleaning the fireplace and glass fireplace enclosures

1. **Make sure the fireplace has not been active for at least 48 hours before cleaning or removing excess ash from fireplace.**
2. **Remove excess ashes and place them in a metal pail or container,** preferably one with a tight-fitting lid, and retain them until all cinders have thoroughly cooled. (You can purchase a pail at a hardware store or online).
 - Place the pail or container of ashes on a noncombustible floor or on the ground, well away from all combustible materials, while cooling.
 - When the ashes have completely cooled, bring the pail to the trash area and empty it into the metal trash can designated to hold fireplace ash.
3. **Do not clean glass fireplace enclosures while they are hot because breakage may occur.**
4. **Do not use an ammonia-based cleaner on the glass or the enclosure.** These types of cleaners may damage the finish of the enclosure. Minor scratches can be removed by applying lemon oil.