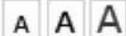


Don't Get Smoked Out of a Chimney Sweep Scam

11/1/2011

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With the chilly weather fast approaching, many consumers are yearning for a toasty fire by the fireplace and looking to have their chimneys cleaned in preparation. However, Better Business Bureau is advising consumers to know which businesses to trust and which to avoid to prevent their hard earned dollars from going up in smoke.

To date this year, BBB has received more than 380 complaints against chimney cleaners, which is up from the 342 complaints received in all of 2010.

“Chimney sweeping is not something that homeowners deal with often, so we may lack knowledge of the cleaning process,” said Katherine Hutt, spokesperson for the Council of Better Business Bureaus. “Many scammers take advantage of this and do shoddy work...or no work at all.”

In some cases, consumers have reported calls stating the town fire department recommends the resident's chimney be cleaned. The calls go on to recommend a particular chimney sweep and endorse their services on behalf of the fire department. Though town fire departments do recommend having chimneys cleaned on an annual basis, they do not endorse any particular company or inspect chimneys. Many scam artists are targeting the elderly, making vague, unclear phone calls claiming they have done business in the past and it is time for their annual sweep.

Scam artists are also advertising at a much lower price than legitimate businesses. Typically, a professional chimney sweep will charge between \$150 and \$200 for the cleaning of one chimney shaft, whereas scam artists are charging as little as \$50. BBB advises that if a price sounds too good to be true, it usually is.

Many scam artists use a low price tactic to get in your door, at which point they recommend additional work be done immediately, bullying the consumer into a much more expensive bill. If the price you are quoted is significantly lower than that of other businesses, it should be viewed as a red flag.

BBB suggests consumers do their homework before hiring a chimney sweep and inviting them into the home. Additionally, check with your local fire department and with the [Chimney Safety Institute of America](http://csia.org) (csia.org).

BBB recommends using these helpful tips when hiring a chimney sweep:

Check out a chimney sweeping business at bbb.org. Always check with BBB for a trusted chimney sweeping business in your area. Are they an Accredited Business? Do they have any outstanding complaints?

Find out how long they have been in business. How long have they operated in your area? Find out if they offer current references, or if you know anyone who has used their services in the past.

Ask if they have a valid business liability insurance policy. In the event of an accident, this policy keeps your home and belongings safe.

Find out if any employees are certified through CSIA. Though this is not law, it is recommended by the fire department, and speaks to the qualifications of the individual or business you hire. CSIA is a national nonprofit agency with a certification program for chimney sweeps and certification is required of members of the [National Chimney Sweeping Guild](http://NationalChimneySweepingGuild.org).

For more tips you can trust, visit bbb.org.

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