

Department of Public Safety

David C. Noyes

14 TAC Lane - P.O. Box 500 - Waterville Valley, NH 03215

Patrick C. Payer

Director of Public Safety/Fire Chief
dnoyes@wvpublicsafety.com

Administrative 603-236-8809 - Fax 603-236-2056
watervillevalley.org/department-public-safety

Chief of Police
ppayer@wvpublicsafety.com

David Noyes
Fire Chief/Building Inspector/Code Enforcement
Waterville Valley Department of Public Safety
14 TAC Lane
Waterville Valley, NH 03215

September 25, 2023

RE: OPEN LETTER REGARDING FIREPLACE-CHIMNEY INSPECTIONS AND OUR DEPARTMENTS ROLE

Dear Waterville Valley Residents & Property Managers,

As the Fire Chief of Waterville Valley, I wanted to take a moment to emphasize the importance of regular fireplace and chimney inspections, carried out by licensed professionals. I also want to educate you as to the Fire and Building Department's role in this process.

Fireplaces not only provide physical warmth but also contribute to the emotional warmth of our homes by fostering gatherings, stories, and memories that last a lifetime. However, these beautiful hearths come with a responsibility to ensure their safety and functionality.

The focus of this letter is mainly concerning fireplaces in condominiums and commercial properties, but is always good advice for our single-family homeowners. Fireplaces and their chimneys and vents are appliances. Just like your refrigerator, dishwasher, oven, or water heater, they have a finite lifespan. Like all appliances, they will eventually fail. The problem with fireplaces is when they fail, potentially bad things can happen.

Historically, many condominium associations have recognized the need to replace or upgrade fireplaces in a large number of units at the same time. Some associations have been more aggressive with these upgrades while other associations have taken longer to address these issues. NFPA 211 Chapter 14 states that; "*All chimneys, fireplaces, and vents shall be inspected at least once a year.*" I am happy to report that almost all associations, thanks to their property managers, have required at least annual fireplace and chimney inspections.

The role of the Fire and Building Department is to ensure that all **NEW** installations are to code. The town is not, nor will we ever be fireplace or chimney inspectors. That is a licensed profession. Our role is to ensure that new installations are done to code and according to our ordinances. A licensed inspector will inspect your chimney and fireplace to code. Current installations should be inspected to the specifications of the appliance and the code **at the time of installation**. Existing fireplaces and chimneys are only required to meet the requirements of the code or specifications of the appliance at the time of installation.

Fire and building codes are regularly updated. Existing systems are not required to meet the new code requirements until they are replaced or a significant repair has to be made. Any inspections that fail an appliance because it is deemed unsafe, should be attended to. Ignoring the recommendations of the inspection reports has civil implications for the owners. Please be familiar with the requirements of your association and/or the insurance company(s) covering your property. Some associations have rules that dictate the actions of the homeowner when a failed inspection report is received. See your current association by-laws. The fire department does not review inspection reports nor do we condemn appliances, unless there is an issue that we have to respond to, such as a fire.

If a homeowner disagrees with a fireplace/chimney inspection report, there are options. You can deal directly with the licensed inspector and create a plan to mitigate the recommendations. You also have the option to get a second opinion and hire another licensed inspector. Contemporary standards dictate that the most recent inspection report is the most valid. **It is not the position of the fire department to mitigate disagreements between fireplace/chimney inspectors, homeowners, or associations.**

Regular fireplace and chimney inspections are an essential part of this responsibility, and here's why:

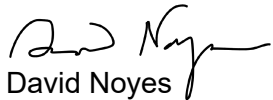
1. ****Fire Prevention:**** Chimney fires can be devastating and pose a significant risk to your property and, more importantly, to the safety of your loved ones. A licensed inspector can identify and address potential fire hazards such as creosote buildup, cracks in the flue, or obstructions in the chimney.
2. ****Efficient Heating:**** A well-maintained chimney ensures the efficient operation of your fireplace or wood-burning stove, which can save you money on heating costs in the long run.
3. ****Carbon Monoxide Safety:**** Cracks or blockages in your chimney can lead to carbon monoxide leaks, which are deadly. Regular inspections can detect these issues and prevent such dangerous situations.
4. ****Prolonging the Lifespan of Your Chimney:**** Routine inspections and maintenance can extend the life of your chimney and fireplace, ensuring they continue to provide warmth and comfort for years to come. To ensure the safety of your home and family, we recommend scheduling annual chimney inspections with a licensed professional. These experts have the knowledge, tools, and experience to identify potential issues that may not be apparent to the untrained eye.

Additionally, I would like to remind you that proper maintenance and responsible use of your fireplace are crucial in preventing fires. Always follow the manufacturer's guidelines for safe operation, use seasoned wood, or use a licensed gas professional and have a fire extinguisher handy.

The safety and well-being of our community members are of paramount importance to us at the Waterville Valley Fire Department. We encourage you to take this opportunity to schedule a chimney inspection with a licensed professional if you haven't done so recently. By doing this, you are taking a proactive step to protect your family, your home, and your neighbors.

Thank you for your commitment to safety and for being a responsible member of our community.

Sincerely,



David Noyes
Fire Chief/Building Inspector/Code Enforcement
Waterville Valley Fire Department, Public Safety