

Snap, crackle, pop: a fireside story

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Fireplace use was common in New Hampshire, where retired nurse Terry Ann Black once lived. She said her neighbors saw it as a more affordable option than heating an entire house using heating oil. “I never thought about the (health) implications,” she said.

She does now.

In addition to having an asthmatic grandson, Black chairs the Lafayette Senior Services Commission. She says exposing the elderly to smoke means possible damage to their heart, lungs, throat and eyes.

“I understand the ambiance (of a fire in the fireplace),” she says, “but...”

Leonard says wood-burning fireplaces must be properly maintained – their interiors kept free of creosote, the chimney spark arrester in good repair and outside vegetation trimmed back 10 feet from chimneys. And proper ventilation for the fireplace room prevents the buildup of deadly carbon monoxide gas, but mainly it’s the sparks Leonard worries about.

She says while manufactured logs make for cleaner burning fuel and leave less ash, those too are banned from use on Spare the Air days. Leonard also cautions against attempting to put out a manufactured log once it is lit; she suggests that people opt for a shorter-burning log if they’re uncertain how long they will be home. Leonard says you may operate gas fireplaces even on Spare the Air days, which might explain why most new homes are being built only with gas fireplaces.

Wood burning fireplaces “are really on their way out in most urban areas,” she says.

Just don’t tell Nat King Cole.

Learn more about wood-burning fires:

Manufactured logs versus split wood:

http://www.science20.com/science_motherhood/firelogs_vs_wood_fires_whats_right_choice_cozy_winter_fire

Nick Greenway website: <http://www.firewood-for-life.com/>

<http://woodheat.org/good-firewood.html>

Spare the Air app: <https://tinyurl.com/yb3lov49>

After tree cutting free fire wood is regularly offered.

Photo courtesy East Bay Tree Service



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