

Electrical Fire Safety

A regular electrical inspection will check your system integrity.

All wiring connections, including aerial leads and supply cables must be spaced a minimum of 30cm away from the thatch and any wire netting.

Electrical wiring in the roof space should be in vermin proof conduits and fitted by a qualified electrician. Vermin control is recommended.

Light fittings in the roof space should be enclosed in a bulkhead – do not use recessed ceiling lights (down lighters) on the upper floor due to overheating potential.

TV aerials should be fitted to a free standing pole or gable end so that they are not attractive to lightning strikes. Overhead supply feeds should have ceramic type insulators replaced.

Outside halogen security lights create a lot of heat, keep away from thatch or use LED instead.

External Fire Prevention

External Fires

Do not light bonfires, barbeques, discharge fireworks or Chinese lanterns where there is a risk that embers or burning material could land on the thatch.

Never be tempted to speed things up by adding lighter fuel, paraffin, diesel or petrol.

Make sure your neighbours and visitors are aware of the potential dangers of external fires and the risks they pose to your thatched property.

Outside the Property

Provide an outside tap with a hose connected, lagged against the frost.

For the Fire Service, be aware of the nearest fire hydrant or water source e.g. pond or river and keep vehicular access clear at all times.

Alarms, Detectors and Early Warning Systems

Smoke alarms should be fitted on all floors and in the roof space.

Carbon monoxide alarms should be installed. All alarms should be regularly tested.

Heat monitors/alarms for woodburner/flue temperatures are recommended as early warning systems. The aim is to burn at the correct temperature and reduce risks associated with hot gases or tars, so being aware and vigilant is important.

There are stand alone and linked systems available and professional advice may be sought.

Fire Safety Products for Thatch

The fire risk (+insurance premiums) may be reduced by the use of specialist products and systems e.g. fire retardant sprays, heat monitors, suppressants, barriers and alarms.

Always advise your insurers of any changes to your property with regard to such products, chimney or installations.

See our website for more details on reducing the Thatch Fire Risk.

Thanks to all interested parties and specialists involved in contributing to this advice.



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Fire Safety for Thatch

From the
Thatch Advice Centre



Understand
Reduce the Risks
Increase Peace of Mind

Do Thatched Property Fires Occur More Often Than Those With Conventional Roofs or is it Just People's Perception?

Statistically, homes with thatched roofs are not more likely to catch fire than those with conventional roofs but, when they do, it can cause severe damage to property and so receives a lot of negative publicity.

Reducing the fire risk in both old and new properties can be achieved by understanding the causes, care with design, taking sensible precautions and utilising relevant fire safety products. This not only helps in the fight against thatch fire but often with insurance cover.

Please check with your Local Authority Planning Department if alterations to historic properties are proposed for improving fire safety.

Our guidance is goodwill, not mandatory, based on years of passionate experience and knowledge and backed up by facts from serious and extensive research by recognised specialists.

Causes of Thatch Fires - The Facts

Based on Burgoyne's Forensic Investigation of 148 thatch fires and also Fire Protection Association work on Chimneys, thatch and woodburners (driven by NFU Mutual and Historic England), we confirm that the main proven cause is **ejected embers from chimneys and chimney fires**. The correlation between woodburners, liners and low chimneys as well as dry weather conditions must be mentioned. More details on our website.

Other causes e.g. electrical faults have also been identified.

The heat transfer theory has not been proven by either forensic evidence or specific research so it is important to concentrate on the facts and deal with reducing burning brands being emitted from chimneys and maintaining chimney integrity.

So, if you have a woodburner don't just line a chimney to meet Building Regulations but also reduce the risk of ejected embers.

Reducing the Risk of Ejected Embers

- Take care when lighting fires e.g. use firelighters (paper and card not recommended) and when refuelling.
- Burn seasoned hardwood / kiln dried wood max moisture 20%.
- Sweep chimneys regularly, not just at the start but during the burning season. Keep woodburner baffles clean.
- Run your woodburner/stove per manufacturer's instructions and avoid aggressive burning.
- Keep an eye on flue/chimney temperature. Too high, speeds up flue gases and increases risk of ejecting burning material. Too low, increases soot and tar in the flue and potential for a chimney fire.
- Spark arrestors are not recommended.
- Think carefully about a bird guard.
- The greater the chimney height the higher the dispersal of any embers away from the thatch.

Building regulations stipulate 1.8m chimney for woodburner installations (contact us for advice if you have a listed property)

General Fire Safety Advice

General sensible fire safety precautions as promoted by the Fire Services should be recognised and utilised. Have a plan, read the kitchen, electric, cigarette, candle and night time safety advice.

Thatch Specific Fire Safety Advice

- Chimneys
- Woodburners and open fires
- Roof Voids
- Electrical
- External
- Alarms, Detectors and Early Warning Systems
- Fire Safety Products for Thatch

Chimneys

In addition to the chimney height, care and cleaning above:-

The risk of damaged chimney structure and pointing allowing hot gases and embers to pass through gaps to the thatch mean that the chimney should be inspected at least once every 3 years by a specialist. Ensure that the chimney is sound and any liner which is installed is also still in good condition i.e. CCTV inspection to identify any areas of concern. A thatcher can also check the hidden exterior section when rethatching.

Professional advice should always be sought with installing an appropriate liner and/or register plate.

Woodburners and Open Fires

Select the most efficient woodburner for the size of your room to achieve the best burning and safest solution, as they generate a lot of heat. Professional advice on the stove and liner should be sought.

Check with your insurance company regarding your cover in relation to stoves and open fires.

Don't burn unseasoned, wet, soft or tanalised wood as they leave greater tar deposits which increases the chimney fire hazard.

Roof Voids

No 'hot work'. Plumbers in roof voids need to use push or compression fittings.

Frozen pipes should only be thawed by hot cloths and not with a blow torch, hot air stripper or hairdryer.

Do not allow smoking, or use a candle, lighter or match as emergency lights. Remember that the interior of an unlined thatched roof is dry, dusty and flammable.

Lofts should be kept free of storage items to allow ease of access in case of a fire.

Access hatches should be not less than 90cm X 60 cm and fire resisting covers are recommended.

