

## **Fireplace & Ash Disposal Safety**

Every year, fire departments respond to numerous fires caused by improper disposal of ash from fireplaces, wood stoves, pellet stoves, and grills.

Even when they're not giving off any smoke or radiating perceptible heat, ashes can harbor hot coals for a long time after the fire goes out. This is because ash acts as an insulator, and coals buried in ash can stay hot for an extended period of time without burning themselves out. These latent coals can be hot enough to ignite paper, wood, vegetation, and even melt through plastics well after you think the fire is out. The exact amount of time it takes for coals to be completely extinguished depends on many factors, such as how hot the fire was, what material was being burned, how much unburned fuel remained, etc.

**To be safe, treat all ashes as hot, even when you think they've had time enough to cool.**

### **How to safely dispose of ashes:**

- If possible, allow ashes to cool for several days in the fireplace, wood stove, grill, or firepit where you had the fire. These devices are designed to contain their heat safely.
- Even if you think the stove or firepit is completely cooled, wear fire resistant gloves when handling it and the ashes.
- When it is time to dispose of the ashes, transfer them to a metal or earthenware container with a snug, non-flammable lid.
- Once the ashes are in the container, put the lid on securely and set it outside your home on a non-combustible surface at least ten feet away from any combustibles until it has fully cooled (wait at least a week). When you think the ashes may be cooled, stir them to verify that they're cool all the way through, making sure there's no hot ash still remaining in the middle. If you need to dispose of the ash without waiting a full week, wet the ashes down to speed up the cooling process. Keep the lid on when you're not checking on the ashes — you're both starving any coals of oxygen and making sure there's no opportunity for the wind to whip up a fire or spread hot ashes to flammable materials.
- Do not place any other combustible materials in the metal container.
- Do not use a combustible container for storing ash (wood, plastic, and cardboard are all very bad ideas).
- Do not put your ash container on or near anything that is capable of catching fire.
- Do not use a regular vacuum cleaner or shop vac to clean out your wood or pellet stove (unless you haven't burned in it for weeks). Only fire resistant vacuum cleaners designed for that purpose can be used safely.
- Once the ashes have completely cooled, you can bag them and take them to the Larimer County landfill or the transfer station near Red Feather. Ashes cannot be disposed of in the association trash compactor (hot ashes have been put in it in the past, starting dangerous fires, so disposing of ash there is now forbidden).

## **More Fireplace Safety Tips**

- Have your chimney and stove inspected and cleaned annually to ensure they are clear of obstructions and creosote. If any damage is found, do not use your fireplace or wood stove again until you've repaired it.
- Never use an accelerant (gas, fire gel, etc) to start a fire in a fireplace or wood stove.
- Do not burn anything in your fireplace or wood stove that is not firewood or kindling — even things that seem safe, like garbage or cardboard may create large firebrands and start a fire in the chimney.
- Ensure the fire is completely out (or safely banked if in a wood stove) before going to bed or leaving the house. Never leave any open fire (ie – any fire not in a wood or pellet stove) unattended for any reason.
- Make sure the area around the fireplace is clear of all combustibles (three feet is a good rule).
- Keep all children and pets a safe distance from fireplaces.
- Install both smoke and carbon monoxide alarms and change the batteries regularly. Changing the batteries at Daylight Savings Time is recommended, as changing the clocks acts as a good reminder to change your batteries.
- Keep a fire extinguisher on hand and regularly check that it's still good (they can fail if kept past their expiration date).
- Observe all the same safety precautions when using grills and firepits.

Crystal Lakes Volunteer Fire Department | [www.clvfd.org](http://www.clvfd.org)