



# R B F & R S

## news release

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### CHIMNEY FIRE DANGERS

Berkshire firefighters are warning people not to try and tackle chimney fires themselves after a woman was injured at her home.

Hungerford and Newbury fire crews called to a home in Radley Bottom, Hungerford new town at 11.12 on the 27 December, discovered a 34-year-old woman who had tried to douse the flames in her chimney by pouring water onto the flames. Unfortunately, the heat of the blaze turned the water into steam immediately and burst back out of the chimney, causing scalds and burns. She was taken to hospital by air ambulance for treatment. Firefighters were called to two other chimney fires the same day, one at the Stag and Hounds pub in Binfield and one at a house in Green Lane, Littlewick Green, near Maidenhead. No-one was hurt in either of these incidents.

Paul Jacques, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service Group Manager for Prevention and Protection, explained: "We have seen a sharp rise so far this winter in the number of chimney fires we are being called to. Whether this is linked to the credit crunch and people are using fires to supplement their central heating we don't know but it is noticeable.

"We strongly urge homeowners to have their chimneys checked and swept if necessary before lighting fires at home, particularly if the chimney has not been used for some time. Whilst a chimney may appear clear from the fireplace, you may not be able to see blockages and weak spots further up. If the worst happens and a fire does happen, call 999 and ask for the fire service. Then get out of the house straight away – never try and put it out yourself. Chimney fires burn at extremely high temperatures and it is not worth the risk."

If you want to have a fire at home, remember:

- Have your chimney inspected and swept regularly (every three months if you are burning logs)
- Always use a fireguard
- Don't use accelerants to start your fire (use approved firelighters if necessary)
- Don't overfill the fireplace with fuel
- Don't leave a fire unattended
- Don't burn paper or rubbish
- Check your loft when the fire is on for any signs of smoke or burning

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For advice on safe use of chimneys, go to the Community Safety pages at [www.rbfrs.co.uk](http://www.rbfrs.co.uk) and click on Quick Links Fire Safety Topics.

**ENDS.**