

Fireplace Glossary

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AFUE (Annual Fuel Utilization Efficiency) – Measurement for rating furnaces and wall heaters as an official heat source.

Blue Flame Rectification – Safety shut-off device.

BTU (British Thermal Unit) – A British Thermal Unit (BTU) is a standard unit of energy that is used in the United States and sometimes in the U.K. It represents the amount of thermal energy necessary to raise the temperature of one pound of pure liquid water by one degree Fahrenheit at the temperature at which water has its greatest density (39 degrees Fahrenheit).

Carbon Dioxide – A gas, produced from carbon units, with sufficient oxygen to produce complete combustion. Carbon dioxide is a component of many natural gases.

Carbon Monoxide – A poisonous, combustible gas formed by incomplete combustion of carbon or reduction of carbon dioxide.

Catalytic Combustor – A device used on some wood burning stoves to reduce the temperature at which smoke is ignited.

Chimney – A vent for combustion by-products.

Chase – A space for chimney to pass through to its highest termination point.

Creosote – A very flammable by-product of combustion that can build up within the smoke pipe and chimney and then ignite, causing “chimney-fire”.

Damper – A device used to reduce or close the opening between the firebox and flue.

Direct Vent – A vent system for gas stoves, fireplaces and

inserts that employs 2 vents – 1 for air intake and 1 for gas exhaust.

Electric Fireplace – A fireplace that realistically simulates a fire. An electric fireplace requires no venting or installation and simply needs to be plugged in.

Electric Insert – An inexpensive appliance that is inserted into a fireplace and plugs into the nearest outlet. Very realistic, inexpensive and warms to 300 square feet.

Electric Stoves – A stove that, realistically simulates a fire. Heats up to 300 square feet.

Electronic Ignition System – A device to light the burner or pilot that requires an electrical current but not a match.

Emissions – By-products of combustion vented out of the home.

Firebacks – Fireplace masonry and mortar protection, that shields them from the extreme heat of the flames. Cast-iron firebacks store heat from the fire and radiate it into the room after the fire has died down. Firebacks work just as well in a modern gas fireplace as they do in a traditional wood burning one.

Fireplace – A structure in a home capable of supporting burning fire when properly maintained.

Fireplace Insert – An appliance that slides into an existing masonry or zero-clearance wood-burning fireplace. A trim panel that surrounds the insert and covers the remainder of the fireplace opening.

Firestops – Devices of non-combustible material that seal any openings separating floors so that smoke or fire cannot penetrate from one level to another.

Flue – Vent or chimney for a combustion device.

Flue Collar – Ring on appliance designed for the attachment of the draft hood, vent connector or venting system, that determines the size of the vent.

Gas Insert – A gas-burning appliance that burns propane (L.P.) or natural gas. Available in direct vent, natural B-vent and vent-free. Can be thermostat or remote controlled.

Gas Log – A burner with an arrangement of logs sitting on it to simulate a wood fire. These are inserted into a masonry or zero-clearance fireplace.

Glass Panel – A single pane of glass separating provides safety and energy efficiency fireplace or stove flames from the room.

Grate – An iron base used to hold burning fuel in a fireplace.

Hearth – The place where the fire can be formed in the home. A hearth is also something that a stove or fireplace sits on.

Heat Shield – A non-combustible protector used around appliances, a smoke pipe or a chimney.

Hopper – A container attached to an appliance in which fuel—either coal, nuggets or wood pellets—are stored and from which the fuel is fed to the burner.

Ignition Systems – Devices that ignite the pilot burner and/or the main burner assembly.

Manifold Pressure – The amount of wc inches that can be supported by different types of gas: the manifold pressure for natural gas is 3.5” wc and for LP gas the manifold pressure is 11” wc.

Mantel – An ornamental facing surrounding the fireplace or simply a shelf above a fireplace.

Masonry Fireplace – A structure made of masonry materials such as brick, stone and/or block. A chimney made of brick or stone is attached at the top to vent combusted by-products from the dwelling.

Metal Liner – Used primarily with fireplace inserts and placed inside an existing chimney (usually masonry) to reduce the diameter of the flue for more rapid exit of smoke and combustion gases. Also used when an existing

chimney is unlimited or deteriorating.

National Fuel Gas Code – A standard for the installation of gas hearth appliances to be used in the absence of local codes.

Natural Draft (B-vent) Appliance – An appliance that takes in combustion air from the home and vents products of combustion outside of the home.

Natural Gas (NG) – Colorless, highly flammable gas consisting mainly of methane. A highly-popular gas because of its flammability and high energy value.

Natural Vent – Also known as a “B-vent”, a single pipe or liner which exhausts combustion by-products.

Orifice – The opening in a cap, spud or other device whereby the flow of gas is limited, and through which the gas is discharged to the burner.

Pellets – Fuel source from recycled sawdust. Probably the least expensive fuel by comparison, pellets have high BTU, minimal ash and only 5% moisture (compared to wood up to 50%).



Pellet Fireplace – There actually is no such thing! Pellet units come only in the form of stoves and inserts.

Pellet Insert – An appliance that burns wood bio-mass pellets. Pellets are loaded into the top and are mechanically fed by motors into the burn pot. Heat is circulated out the front by blowers.

Pellet Stove – An appliance of steel or cast iron that burns wood bio-mass pellets. These have forced exhaust blowers, thermostats and can be horizontally or vertically vented.

Pilot – A small flame used to ignite the gas at the main burner.

Propane – A liquefied petroleum gas (see LPG) containing more heat value than natural gas. It is colorless, odorless and non-toxic.

PSI – Pounds per square inch.

Regulator – Usually it is a part of the combination valve. It reduces the pressure to the appropriate level for the type of gas used in the appliance.

Safety Pilots – A safety shutoff, stops the flow of the gas to the appliance, and provides a heat source to ignite the main burner.

Seasoned – Refers to fuel wood that has been allowed to dry before burning. Seasoning generally takes six to twelve months. Wood burns much easier when its moisture content has been reduced. Freshly cut wood contains over 20 percent water.

Spillage – Process that occurs when flue gases cannot exit the vent system and back up into the dwelling. This usually creates a dangerous situation as incomplete combustion may result in the production of carbon monoxide.

Spill Switch – Devices used to detect spillage of flue gas, but similar to high limit switches in that they are activated based on temperature.

Standing Pilot Ignition – A means to light the main gas burner through the use of a standing pilot light.

Stove – A freestanding appliance that has a small, round vent or none at all. These can be placed against a wall, in a corner or in front of an existing fireplace. Gas stoves can work with blowers, remote controls and thermostats.

Therm – A unit of heating value equivalent to 100,000 British Thermal Units (BTUs).

Thermo Sensor – Automatically turns blower on and off.

Vent Free – No chimney or pipe. Gas stoves, fireplaces and inserts burn 99.9% efficient if, and only if, they are installed professionally and maintained regularly (at least annually). Not good for those with breathing difficulties or sinus sensitivity (asthma or allergies). Because you are burning room air, scents of burning pet dander, dust, and carpet lint can be smelled. Also, they put nearly 1 gallon of water vapor into your home every 4 hours... mold and mildew alert!



Venting – To provide an exit. In gas appliances, venting is used to distribute air through a specific environment to maintain temperature and to remove dangerous combustion by-products.

wc (water column) – Measurement of the pressure of gas. There are 28 wcs in one pound of PSI.

Wood Burning Fireplace – A zero-clearance product that must be vented with its matching pipe (chimney). Can usually be retrofitted to burn gas logs. These are typically used for appearance and are the lowest efficiency fireplace of all.

Wood Insert – An appliance that burns firewood (cordwood). It leads from the front and can be burned safely overnight. The chimney doesn't have to be fully lined, but is recommended.

Wood Stove – An appliance of steel or cast iron that burns cordwood (no wax logs please!) and can be equipped with a blower.

Zero-Clearance Wood Burning Fireplace – A factory-built fireplace complete with fire chamber and usually a metal surround. The chimney is typically on the outside of the house and is framed with siding that matches the rest of the house. These almost never have a brick chimney.

Zero Clearance Gas Fireplace – A factory-built fireplace complete with logs. Needing no outside chimney, these fireplaces can be vented horizontally (like a dryer vent) or vertically through the roof. They are available as ventless (no vent) or direct vent.