

Time to sweep the chimney

Before you light your fire again it's a good idea to get the chimney sweeps round before everyone else books them up.

There are several good reasons for keeping your flues clean. Perhaps the most obvious one is that your home insurance may not cover you in case of a fire if you can't provide proof that you have had it swept within the last 12 months.

However, each insurance company has its own rules, so you should read the general terms, the "Incendie" (fire) chapter, and see if *ramonage* (chimney sweeping) is mentioned. It can also appear in the chapter "Vos devoirs" (Your duties).

You could be personally liable if anyone is hurt due to a fire caused by a dirty chimney. But bear in mind that when a fire does break out, the police or *gendarmes* investigating will try to locate the origin and if their report makes it clear that a chimney was not the cause, this can influence the insurer's decision.

As far as the law is concerned, the duties of a French mayor include making sure that all chimneys, ovens, furnaces of houses and factories in his *commune* be cleaned at least once a year*. Boilers must also be carefully maintained. Whether you are the owner or the tenant, you are responsible for ensuring that the hot-water and central-heating boiler you use are checked annually by a heating engineer (*chauffagiste*).

When choosing a sweep (*ramoneur*) beware of hawkers – make sure the work is done by a professional who is covered by a liability insurance (*responsabilité civile*), in case of any



flaws in the work. The sweep should give you a statement (*attestation*) that the chimney has been swept along its entire length.

When your stove or heating system was fitted, the equipment was adjusted to the draught of your chimney. If your chimney gets filled up with soot, the quality of draught changes but the parameters of your installation don't. This means you will use more fuel and it will cost you more to heat your house to the same temperature.

Soot can catch alight and is a common cause of chimney fires. The quality of the wood you burn (oak is very 'clean') and its dryness both affect how much soot builds up.

There is also a real danger of carbon monoxide poisoning when the gas stays in the house instead of going up and out through the chimney. Some 300 people die like this each year in

France, and 4,000 suffer from respiratory problems after inhaling carbon monoxide, which is all the more dangerous as you cannot smell it.

Instead of having a sweep, you may be tempted to buy a chemical brick to burn in the fireplace which is supposed to clean your chimney. However, we don't recommend this product as it corrodes the inside of the pipe and could do more harm than good. So for now, there is no good alternative to old-fashioned cleaning by scraping the inside of the flue with a hard brush adapted to the width.

Who pays? If you are the owner of a house or flat and you lease it out, it is up to the tenant to pay to have the chimney swept and boiler cleaned each year.

If you are an owner or tenant in a block of flats, these costs are included in the *charges* you pay to the *syndic de copropriété* (property manager).

◆ Smoke detectors compulsory

In France, since a change in the law in February 2009, at least one approved smoke detector (*détecteurs avertisseurs autonomes de fumée* – DAAF) is now compulsory in every home. It is the responsibility of the occupant (tenant or owner) to ensure that the equipment is installed within three years of the new law.

Thanks to Philippe Schreinemacher, Générali Insurance, for help in compiling this article: www.insurance.fr

*Article L2213-26 in the Code général des collectivités, créé par Loi 96-142 1996-02-21 jorf 24 février 1996.

New law on classic mopeds

Do you have a Vélo Solex or other type of collectible motorised bike? The government has introduced legislation to help the police manage the problems of stolen *cyclomoteurs* and identifying the owners, with a simple system of registration. Like so many laws, it is straightforward when applied to the target vehicles, but produces headaches for collectors of older vehicles.



If you buy a new two-wheeler with a small motor, the procedure is simple. You show the *préfecture* the receipt, some ID, the certificate of conformity identifying the bike and the serial number. Then, at the moment without charge, they issue a registration document – no plates needed.

If you have bought one prior to the legislation you have until Dec 31, 2010 to obtain the document. If not, it becomes an object which can be bought and sold freely but which cannot be used on public roads. There are penalties for ignoring this and for late registration.

The problem arises with *cyclomoteurs* like the Vélo Solex, a classic French mode of transport one or more of which many people still have in the *grange* or garage. The company no longer exists; probably the purchase and sale history since new does not exist either and the bike never had a compliance plate or document.

Fortunately, the FFVE (Fédération Française des Véhicules d'Époque) has negotiated a solution. This is the body which represents member clubs in relations with the government and if your car club is not a member, it may be missing out.

The process is that you send as much detail on the bike as you have to the FFVE at ffve@wanadoo.fr with a request for a *certificat de conformité*. The FFVE will send documentation for a fee of €25. If you have the documented ownership history, fine – if not a current insurance policy showing you as the owner will suffice and you will need your ID.

From past experience, some *préfectures* will not be familiar with this dispensation and can be difficult. If concerned carry a copy of the reference document 'FFVE Flash – Immatriculation des Cyclomoteurs 23/8/2010' which the FFVE will supply on request. Or download it from <http://tinyurl.com/38teqcg>.

Gerry Freed

FIRE FACTS & FIGURES

- In France there is an accidental fire every two minutes
- 800 deaths and 10,000 injured by fires each year
- 250,000 accidental fires in homes are declared each year to insurance firms
- Fire is the second most common home accident to cause the death of children under five
- One person in three will be the victim of an accidental fire in their life
- One glass of water is enough to put out a fire in the first minute of a fire, a bucket of water in the second minute but from the third minute only a tank of water can contain a fire.
- Despite the new legislation, the loi Morange, fewer than 5% of French homes are equipped with a smoke detector. In Britain, 89% of homes are equipped; Norway 98%; Canada 94% and the USA 95%. In Britain, a law in 1991 making smoke detectors compulsory in new builds, coupled with an awareness campaign, raised the rate from 10% in 1989 and the number of victims of fire halved over the same period.

Technically speaking Getting British TV in France

Marcus Williamson answers some frequently asked questions

Q. Can I receive ALL the same satellite TV channels in France as I can in the UK?

A. Yes, you can access all the same channels here with a correctly set-up digital satellite system.

Q. Is it legal to watch UK TV channels here in France?

A. Perfectly legal, just so long as you pay your French TV licence fee. This is the Contribution à l'audiovisuel public (formerly the Redevance Audiovisuelle), which is collected with your local *taxe d'habitation*. A European Council directive (89/552/EEC) enshrines in

law the right of any European national to receive their own country's TV channels wherever they live within the EU.

Q. Can I get UK radio stations through a digital satellite receiver?

A. Yes, all the BBC national and the main UK commercial radio stations are available with a correctly installed satellite system.

Q. Must I pay a subscription to receive the basic TV channels?

A. No, you can tune into the free-to-air TV and radio channels (BBC, ITV, Ch4, Ch5 etc) without a

subscription, using a Sky digibox or a Freesat digital receiver.

Q. Do I have to install a 'branded' Sky or Freesat Receiver?

A. I strongly recommend that you install a branded receiver. If you install a generic digital satellite receiver you will not be able to receive any of the Sky or Freesat subscription services, cannot use Interactive Services and will not get automatic channel updates.

Q. Can I use a UK Freeview box in France?

A. Freeview does not work here in France, as it is the



UK digital TV system that can only be received in the UK through an aerial.

Q. What size satellite dish will I need?

A. North and West of France: Sky Zone 1 Minidish or 60cm local dish; South-West: Sky Zone 2 Minidish or a local 80cm dish; South-East of France: 90cm standard dish.

Many thanks to Dave 'Skyman' Smith for his help putting together this Q&A. For more information about installations in the Languedoc-Roussillon region, see his site at <http://www.british-tv-in-france.co.uk>

Email your technical queries to Marcus: ct@french-week.com

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