



Chimney Inspections Explained

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As part of the routine Home Inspection process, your Professional Home Inspector may recommend further evaluation or inspection of a fireplace and/or chimney by an appropriate specialist. Typically your Inspector may recommend a "Level II" inspection. The types of specialized inspections that may be performed, and resources to find the appropriate specialists, are discussed below:

NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION (NFPA) CHIMNEY INSPECTION PROCEDURE

The inspection of chimneys is important to detect problems with the venting system. Heating appliances and their venting systems can be hazardous when not properly installed, or when damage or deterioration has occurred. Professional fireplace inspectors and chimney sweeps routinely conduct these inspections, and should follow the procedure defined by NFPA (National Fire Protection Association).

The NFPA (code 211) procedure defines three levels of inspection according to the circumstances that "trigger" the need for the inspection. A Level I Inspection is the most basic type of inspection, while Level II and Level III Inspections are progressively more detailed and thorough.

LEVEL I INSPECTIONS

A Level I Inspection is generally limited to readily accessible areas of the chimney structure, with additional requirements to insure the flue is clear. *Readily accessible* areas are those areas that can be reached for inspection or maintenance without the use of tools or ladders. A Level I Inspection will include checking the basic appliance installation and connection, checking readily accessible portions of the chimney structure and flue, and determining that the flue is not obstructed.

A Level I Inspection is the recommended level of inspection:

- * During annual chimney inspections
- * During routine service of the venting system, including chimney sweeping
- * Upon direct replacement of a connected appliance with one of similar type
- * At any other time an inspection is warranted, and conditions of use of the venting system are not changing

LEVEL II INSPECTIONS

A Level II Inspection is generally limited to accessible areas of the chimney structure and appliance installation. *Accessible* areas are those that can be reached without destructive action to the building or building finish. Access may require the movement or opening of doors and panels, and may require the use of common hand tools or ladders. A Level II Inspection will include all portions of a Level I Inspection as well as accessible areas of the chimney structure, including areas within accessible attics, basements and crawl spaces. In addition, a Level II Inspection will include an examination of the chimney interior by video scanning or other comparable means of inspection. The inspector should also determine that the flue is properly sized for the connected appliance(s).

A Level II Inspection is the recommended level of inspection:

- * Upon addition or removal of one or more connected appliances, or replacement of an appliance with one of dissimilar type, input rating or efficiency.
- * Prior to relining or replacement of flue lining.
- * Upon sale or transfer of the property
- * After an operating malfunction or external event likely to have caused damage to the chimney.

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LEVEL III INSPECTIONS

A Level III Inspection includes all portions of a Level I and a Level II Inspection as well as examination of non-accessible areas of the chimney structure that are reasonably suspected of containing hazards. *Non-accessible* areas are those areas that cannot be reached without damage or destruction to the chimney, building or building finish, or areas that would require special tools to reach. Examination of non-accessible areas should be limited to suspect problem areas. In as much as inspection of these non-accessible areas will likely result in damage to the building the inspector and homeowner should discuss these details beforehand.

A Level III Inspection is the recommended level of inspection:

- * Where necessary for the investigation of an incident which has caused damage to the chimney or building.
- * Where a hazard detected or suspected as the result of a Level I or II Inspection cannot be fully evaluated without access to concealed areas.

As you can see, not all inspections are created equal, and the requirements of the inspection change with the circumstances giving rise to the inspection. The NFPA Inspection procedure details for the homeowner and the inspector what parts of the chimney should be inspected under a given set of circumstances.

LOCATING FIREPLACE INSPECTORS AND CHIMNEY SWEEPS

Fireplace inspections are typically performed by fireplace inspectors or chimney sweeps. Two possible sources for finding qualified fireplace inspectors and/or chimney sweeps are listed below:

* **FIREPLACE INVESTIGATION RESEARCH AND EDUCATION SERVICE**

- o Web site: www.f-i-r-e-service.com (includes a searchable directory of Certified Fireplace Inspectors)

* **CHIMNEY SAFETY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA (CSIA)**

- o Web site: www.csia.org (includes a searchable directory of Certified Chimney Sweeps)

Regardless of the source, please make sure the Company you hire is familiar with the requirements of NFPA 211 Level II inspections. NFPA 211 recommends that a Level II inspection be performed upon sale or transfer of a property.

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Since 1976, the California Real Estate Inspection Association (CREIA), a non-profit voluntary membership organization has been providing education, training, and support services to the real estate inspection industry and to the public. Inspectors must adhere to CREIA's Code of Ethics and follow the Standards of Practice developed by the association. These Standards of Practice have been recognized by the State of California, and are considered the source for home inspector Standard of Care by the real estate and legal communities.