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## The Truth About Chimney Inspections

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*Special to the Palisadian-Post*

If you have purchased a home in the past few years, there is a good chance your real estate agent recommended you do a chimney inspection, along with other inspections such as a general home, sewer, etc.

Your chimney inspector will usually do a Level 2 inspection, as that is what is done when a buyer is in escrow. Typically, no special tools are needed to perform a Level 2 inspection and it involves a video inspection to examine the inside of the chimney.

The five most common chimney issues involve creosote, cracks in the flue, blockage, brickwork, and chimney cap or crown.

**Creosote:** When you start a fire and burn wood, the material that is left inside the chimney lining is called creosote. It is usually black or very dark.

Approximately seven years ago, the South Coast Air Quality Management District board ruled that no new construction homes could be built to allow wood to be burned, so the creosote issue is found in older homes that still allow wood-burning fireplaces.

The main issue with creosote is that it is very flammable, so it can cause a fire inside the chimney, which is why they need to be professionally cleaned.

**Blockage:** Examples are debris, leaves, birds' nest, etc.

**Cracks in the flue:** Most often this is seen in clay tile, which cracks more easily, as opposed to a stainless steel lining, which almost never needs to be replaced. When there are cracks in clay tile, the heat can start a house fire.

**Brickwork issues:** This is more common with very old chimneys or ones after an earthquake, where the mortar deteriorates and moisture gets in.

**Chimney cap and crown:** These can be found at the very top of the chimney, and

keep rain and other elements out and helps sparks from flying out.

When you did your chimney inspection, you probably were surprised to find several thousand dollars' worth of issues that the chimney inspector explained made the chimney unsafe and should not be used.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission Residential Fire Loss Estimates as of 2017 found there were 22,500 fireplace, chimney and chimney connector fires that year in the U.S. from 126 million households. This comes to .02 percent chance of a fireplace or chimney fire—or a 99.98 percent of not having one.

Interestingly, in contrast I have spoken to senior chimney inspectors who have performed over 10,000 inspections. Surprisingly they find issues with 99.9 percent of the chimneys they inspect, with the average repair cost ranging between \$5,000 and \$10,000.

I have even experienced brand new construction homes where chimney inspectors have recommended significant chimney repairs after a city inspector had already signed off on the chimney.

Almost every issue that a chimney inspector finds is considered a fire hazard. One common misconception is if it is a gas fireplace that the fire safety issues are not a concern, but inspectors are still concerned, as fire is fire.

Another thing that most buyers are not aware of is that if a chimney city inspector requires a certain size requirement to pass code, but the actual chimney manufacture requires a more conservative requirement, then the chimney inspector will require the more conservative requirement, due to liability concerns.

This is not to say there are not legitimate chimney issues—for example, big cracks in the flue, crumbling mortar, very tall chimneys past the roofline that have not been braced properly or shroud covers not on the top of

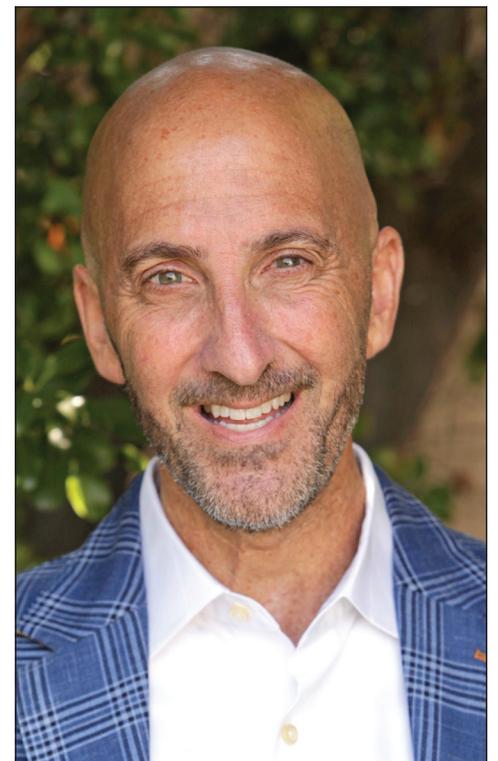
chimney to prevent sparks from flying.

Just interesting to see that chimney inspectors find issues with 99.9 percent of chimneys, yet we see so few chimney fires every year.

When a buyer finds a few thousand dollars of chimney repairs during escrow, what typically happens is they ask the seller for a credit against their closing costs at the close of escrow.

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*Anthony founded Amalfi Estates 24 years ago. He has sold over \$1 billion in properties and was selected by the WSJ as one of the top 60 agents in the country out of one million agents. He has been the No. 1 agent in the Palisades over the past five years. He can be reached on his cell at 310-293-9280, amalfiestates.com or stop by Amalfi Estates at 984 Monument Street, Suite 105.*



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