



Protecting your thatched property from fire



Handy advice and tips to prevent fire from ruining your home.

90%

of fires in thatch roofs are caused by a faulty flue or chimney.

Thatched roofing – understanding the risks

Thatched roofing is an effective and attractive way to insulate your home, and is part of Suffolk's heritage. Fires at thatched properties are rare, but it is important that you have the advice to hand to keep your property safe from the risk of fire.

This handy guide summarises how you can minimise the risks so that you can enjoy the many benefits that a thatched property can offer.

The main causes of thatch fires and how to prevent them

- 1. Heat transfer** – The principal cause of fire at thatched homes is heat transfer, which is the result of heat moving from the brickwork of the chimney flue to the thatch of your roof.

How to prevent it – Insulate the chimney flue to prevent the heat from transferring into the thatch. This is especially important when a solid fuel or wood burner is installed as they burn at higher temperatures than conventional open fires.

- 2. Chimney fires** – This problem can occur in any home with a working flue. Old or poorly maintained chimneys can lead to smoke and hot gases escaping into the upper rooms, roof space or directly into the thatch. Soot is also a combustible material in its own right, and is extremely flammable once ignited.

How to prevent it – Firstly, have the chimney swept by a qualified chimney sweep, twice a year if used regularly. Have the chimney inspected by a qualified chimney engineer. Thatched properties should have tall chimneys, with a minimum of 1.8 metres clearance between the rim of the chimney pot and the thatch.

- 3. Open fires and wood burners** – Many thatched homes were built with single-skin brick chimneys that rise through a deep thatch layer. Modern enclosed fuel appliances are designed to burn efficiently and cleanly, expelling hot particles. However, when they are installed in older chimneys and there is only a four-inch layer of brick between the flue and the thatch, heat can transfer and cause a fire.

How to prevent it – As above with chimney fires, plus only burn seasoned wood.

- 4. Spark arrestors** – In the past, homeowners were encouraged to install spark arrestors to prevent sparks issuing from the chimney and igniting the thatch. Recent research by RHM Technology has shown that some chimney fires were caused by restrictors on the roof, and often these were clogged spark arrestors.

How to prevent it – If you have a spark arrestor, clean it regularly. This should be done every three months for chimneys in regular use and the arrestor should be taken down to clean.

Safety devices

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service strongly recommends smoke detectors in your property as follows:

- Ideally, fit a smoke alarm on every floor of your home – on the ceilings in the hallway or landing
- Put a detector in your loft space and link this to others inside the house
- Don't put a smoke alarm in your kitchen, where it could be triggered accidentally
- Test the batteries once a week

You may also consider fitting thatch heat sensors, stovepipe thermometers, tar removers or domestic sprinklers. To find out more, contact your local fire prevention officer.

Make a fire plan

Make sure your whole family knows what to do in the event of a fire and how to escape safely. This should include:

- Planning your escape routes and keeping exits clear
- Keeping door and window keys handy
- Considering how a fire in your house will be detected. Do you have a sufficient number of smoke alarms and are they in the right places? (See 'Safety devices' above)
- Make a salvage plan, listing the key items you'd want saved in the event of a fire and where they are. Consider keeping important documents in a fireproof box

General advice in the home



- **Did you know that two thirds of house fires start in kitchens?** Combat the risk by installing a fire blanket, having a fire extinguisher to hand, keeping items that catch fire easily away from cookers and toasters and never fill chip pans more than one-third full of oil.
- **Electrics** – check for signs of loose wiring, and faulty plugs or sockets. Replace any worn out or taped-up cables and leads, and don't overload sockets. Use a qualified electrician.
- **Workmen** – if you are having any work done on your home involving plumbing, paint stripping or other 'hot works', make sure the workmen are fully aware of the potential risks of a thatch fire.
- **Bonfires** – always minimise the number and location of bonfires to limit the risk of fire. Discuss this with neighbours who have a bonfire near your property.
- **Water supplies** – assess water supplies and consider having an outside tap with enough hose pipe to reach around your house, including the roof.

Remember...

In the event of a fire, get out of your property and call 999 as soon as you can. Only tackle a fire if it is absolutely safe for you to do so.

For further information

Suffolk Fire & Rescue Service

 01473 260588
 www.suffolk.gov.uk

The National Society of Master Thatchers

 www.nmst.co.uk

The East Anglia Master Thatchers Association

 www.eamta.co.uk

National Association of Chimney Sweeps

 www.chimneyworks.co.uk

Local fire prevention officers

 www.firekills.gov.uk

National Fireplace Association

 www.nfa.org.uk

Thatchgard

 www.thatchgard.com

If you need help to understand this information in another language please call **08456 066 067**.

Se precisar de ajuda para ler estas informações em outra língua, por favor telefone para o número abaixo.

Portuguese

Jeżeli potrzebujesz pomocy w zrozumieniu tych informacji w swoim języku zadzwoń na podany poniżej numer.

Polish

এই লেখাটি যদি অন্য ভাষাতে বুঝতে চান তাহলে নিচের নম্বরে ফোন করুন

Bengali

بەم زانیاری هێشتنێ ئه ب ت گهیهنتی هه یارمهت پ ویستیت بهگهیه
بکه.وهی خوارم ژماره ندی بهیهه پهمان کی تر تکایه

Kurdish

如果你需要其他語言來幫助你了解這些資訊，請撥以下電話。

Chinese

اگر شما نیاز دارید که این اطلاعات را به زبان دیگری دریافت کنید لطفاً به شماره زیر تلفن کنید.

Farsi

If you would like this information in another format, including audio tape or large print, please call **08456 066 067**.



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