

Business / Sunday

Day is year-round job

tell them that their chimney is safe. We don't do that, can't do that. You can see whether it's dirty or not by

Chimneys caused 26 percent of the solid fuel-related fires — 19,000 — across the nation in 1987, according to the U.S. Consumer Prod-

Chimney sweep's work is never done

Full-time sweep works all year — not just in fall

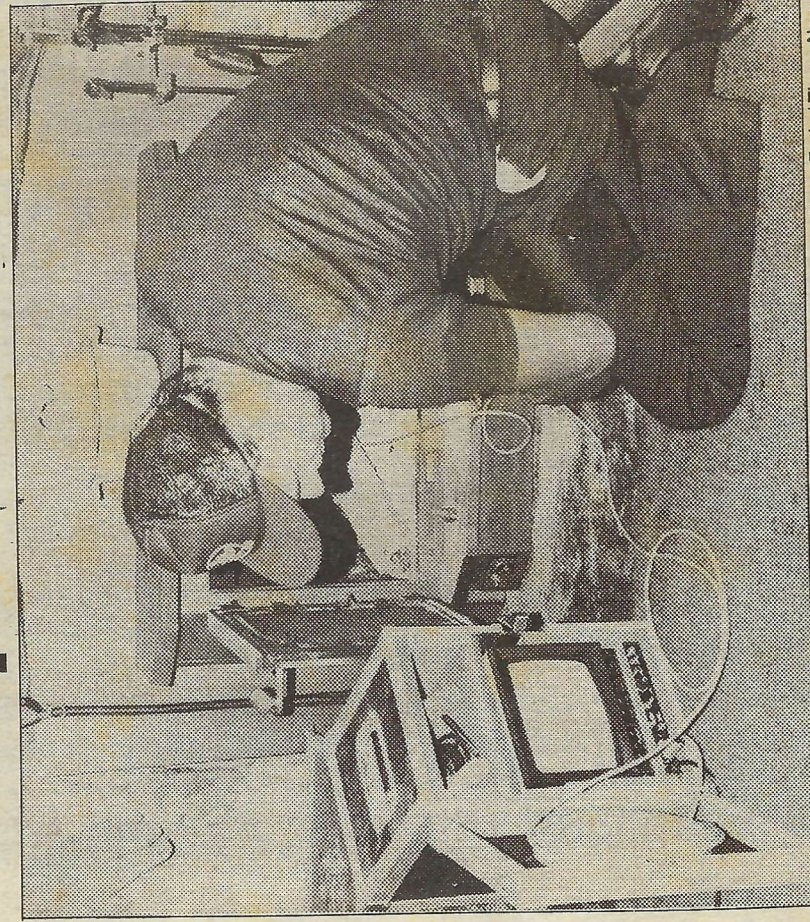
By TONY ENDS
Times-News staff writer

It's spring, time to put away the chain saw and ax, close the damper to the fireplace and switch on the air conditioning. Cutting fire wood and cleaning the chimney can wait till next fall.

Right? While many people who use wood to heat their homes have turned their thoughts to spring and the long hot summer ahead, many full-time chimney sweeps are still hard at work. And their response to putting off chimney maintenance till fall is "No!" — for reasons that speak to logic and convenience, heating appliance care and homeowner safety.

"We've had quite a few calls on chimney fires this year," said Ken Rutter, who has been in the chimney sweep business in Henderson County since the latter part of 1985.

"I think it has to do with the warm spells during the winter, in which creosote deposits dry out and flake off. It seems to make it that much easier to catch fire when people fire up their



Tony Ends / Times-News

Ken Rutter, of Henderson County, demonstrates the use of a Chim-Scan. Rutter has been using the closed circuit TV to scan chimney liners for cracks. Full-time professional chimney sweeps today often do much more than cleaning, including chimney waterproofing, masonry repair work and relining, lightning protection and homeowner education.

What to look for when a chimney sweep is called

When a homeowner starts looking for a chimney sweep, what should he look for in the person he hires and the job he performs?

Following is a check list of a few things many firefighting personnel and professional sweeps consider important.

- **Certification** — Is the sweep certified? While no state presently requires a license to clean chimneys, there are both national and state certification programs.

North Carolina's certification requires essentially the same exam as the national chimney sweep program.

It also requires an oral exam taken before master sweeps with the state guild and a practical exam administered by a master sweep. Guild members must attend the regular meetings and seminars of the guild to maintain certification by keeping up with changes in the industry.

- **Insurance** — Does the sweep have liability insurance? Most of the full-time professional chimney sweeps who work year-round in the area carry enough liability insurance to protect

Chimney sweep's work today

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The metal products usually come with a 25-year warranty, so this isn't something that happens quickly. But your heating appliances will last longer if they're properly cared for."

Moreover, Rutter said, many people complain of the odor of ash and creosote that comes from the down-draft in chimneys during spring.

"Attic fans can create an inversion of air in chimneys and fill a house with this odor," he said.

Summer can also be a good time to tend to chimney waterproofing and masonry repair. There are five full-time chimney sweeps working in Henderson County, and each of them can perform these services in addition to cleaning chimneys.

"Summer is a good time to do waterproofing," said Mark Anderson, who has been in the chimney sweep business for about two and one half years, "and to install caps to protect your system.

"For waterproofing, you have to have the right temperature and the right number of dry days for the work to have enough time to cure."

Many of the crowns on chimneys in this area, Anderson said, have used just a thin layer of the same mortar mix used to build the chimney. The crown is supposed to be several inches thick and composed of waterproof cement.

If the crown is not waterproof, moisture can accumulate throughout the chimney, including the damper and firebox or stove. This moisture can rust out a stove or damper. What's worse, when bricks have been collecting moisture all spring and summer and a fire is lit in the fall, the bricks will crack threatening the homeowner's safety.

"People are more apt to get better service now," Anderson added. "Sweeps aren't as busy right now

and they can take more time to check out a system thoroughly."

Patti Dayton, an office manager for Lord George Chimney Sweeps on Mills Gap Road, said she usually books 50 chimney cleaning jobs every Sept. 1.

George Kufhner, who owns the business, said that he keeps two sweeping crews and one chimney relining crew busy in a three-county area every fall trying to serve customers from a list of 5,000 clients.

That can leave professional chimney sweeps little time to make sure their customers' systems are clean and safe before cold weather sets in.

It can also attract many people who don't work as chimney sweeps year-round to the business.

"We have seasonally, people who take this on as an extra job," Rutter said. "Those people are many times not certified and haven't kept up with changes in the field."

"We call them brush jockeys or flu-by-nights," said Clint Bernard, of Morganton. Bernard has been president of The North Carolina Guild of Professional Chimney Sweeps for about three years.

The guild requires its members to pass a three-level exam to become certified.

This includes a written exam covering building codes and common sense questions relating to wood burning and venting systems.

An oral exam before three certified master chimney sweeps follows. A performance examination, in which the sweep cleans and inspects a chimney in the presence of a certified master chimney sweep, completes the exam.

"If you go through the whole process, you should have all the minimum knowledge you need to do a good job," Bernard said. "Whether or not the sweeps do or not, we can't control."

Though there are probably tens of thousands of chimneys in oper-

ation across the state, Bernard said there are only about 100 members of the guild. Of that number, about 40 sweeps are presently certified.

Of the full-time sweeps operating in Henderson County, David Matthews and Lee Taylor are members of the guild, and Anderson is a member and working toward certification. Kufhner is certified in the guild, and Rutter is the only certified master sweep.

Master sweep designation with the guild requires a certified guild member to produce documentation that he has cleaned at least 320 chimneys.

Rutter is a retired Air Force major and has a master's in business administration that he earned through the University of Utah while in the service.

Since August of last year, he has been using a Chim-Scan camera/light system with a nine-inch television monitor to inspect chimneys.

Tile in a chimney liner may or may not be damaged, depending on how hot and for how long a chimney fire has burned. "A clay liner starts cracking at about 1,400 degrees," Rutter said.

"A chimney caked with a quarter-inch of soot and creosote plus a small spark and enough draft is all it takes. In a matter of seconds that chimney can turn into a roaring inferno.

"As the fire intensifies, the natural draft keeps on multiplying, and the temperature can soar to over 2,000 degrees — so hot it can melt the very mortar that holds the brick together."

Rutter said the intense heat and flames can escape through any chinks or cracks in the chimney into the house.

"This county is full of cracked chimneys. I have lined 50 or 60 chimneys a year, and I haven't even scratched the surface," he said.

"To me, the Chim-Scan is the only way you can determine that there's a crack in the liner of the

chimney," city f
Hendrix said. "You
down there all o
whether there's a
"People call us t

What to look for in a chimney sweep

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homeowner is getting the job he is paying for, there are a couple of things he can do to check a chimney sweep's work. A wood-burning stove and chimney cannot be properly cleaned in 30 to 45 minutes unless a liner has been installed from stove to chimney top.

To be properly cleaned, certified sweeps say the stove must be pulled out of the fireplace.

On many occasions the stove produces a hard black shiney glaze

make the chimney safe for another season, this glaze must be removed. A brush will not remove this hard glaze no matter how hard it is swept. One of several special tools must be used to remove the glaze.

After the sweep is finished cleaning and before the stove is put back into the fireplace, certified sweeps say it is a good idea to ask to look up the chimney.

One should be able to see the walls of the flue tiles or the brick if the chimney has no liner clearly if