OTTAWA FIREPLACES

Seasonal Considerations & Ottawa Climate

Pre-season preparation, winterization, freeze-thaw impacts, and seasonal timing for Ottawa fireplace projects

23 Expert Answers from Fireplace IQ

ottawafireplaces.com/construction-brain

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Q1

How do I prevent mice and squirrels from nesting in my Ottawa chimney during the summer months when the fireplace isn't used?

Installing a proper chimney cap with mesh screening is the most effective way to prevent mice, squirrels, and other small animals from nesting in your Ottawa chimney during the warmer months. A quality stainless steel chimney cap with 1/4-inch to 1/2-inch mesh will block entry while still allowing proper ventilation and rain protection.

Ottawa's urban wildlife is particularly persistent when it comes to finding nesting sites, and chimneys offer an ideal combination of shelter, protection from predators, and easy access from nearby trees. Squirrels are especially problematic in neighborhoods like the Glebe, Westboro, and New Edinburgh where mature trees provide highway access to rooflines. The issue becomes more serious in Ottawa because our long winters mean animals that establish nests in spring may remain there for 6 to 8 months, potentially damaging the chimney liner, blocking the flue, and creating fire hazards when you restart your fireplace in fall.

Start by having your chimney inspected to ensure no animals are currently present before installing screening. If you hear scratching, chirping, or see droppings, contact a wildlife removal service first - sealing animals inside creates a much worse problem. Once the chimney is clear, install a chimney cap with fine mesh screening that covers the entire flue opening. The mesh should be small enough to exclude mice (1/4-inch) but large enough to prevent clogging with debris. Stainless steel mesh resists Ottawa's freeze-thaw cycles better than galvanized steel, which can rust and deteriorate within a few years.

Important considerations: Never use chicken wire or hardware cloth as a temporary solution - these materials deteriorate quickly and can create sharp edges that injure animals without effectively excluding them. Also trim tree branches that hang within 8 to 10 feet of your chimney, as squirrels can easily jump this distance. Check your chimney cap annually for damage, as determined squirrels can chew through lightweight screening materials.

If you need a chimney cap installed or want a professional assessment of your chimney's vulnerability to wildlife intrusion, you can browse experienced chimney technicians through the Ottawa Construction Network directory who understand the specific wildlife challenges Ottawa homeowners face.

Q2

Why does frozen condensation form inside my gas fireplace vent pipe during Ottawa's coldest nights and how do I fix it?

Frozen condensation in your gas fireplace vent pipe during Ottawa's brutal cold snaps is actually a normal occurrence that happens when the moisture produced by gas combustion meets the extreme temperature differential between your warm exhaust gases and our -25 to -30 degree winter nights. Modern high-efficiency gas fireplaces produce significant water vapor as a byproduct of clean combustion, and when that moisture-laden exhaust hits the frigid Ottawa air in your vent pipe, it condenses and can freeze into ice crystals or even solid ice blockages.

This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in Ottawa because of our extreme continental climate and the fact that many homeowners run their gas fireplaces for extended periods during our long heating season. The problem is most severe with direct-vent units that have horizontal terminations or short vertical runs, where the exhaust doesn't have enough time or distance to fully exit before cooling. High-efficiency condensing gas fireplaces are especially prone to this issue because they extract so much heat from the combustion gases that the exhaust temperature is relatively low by the time it reaches the vent termination.

The immediate solution is to run your fireplace for 10-15 minutes at high flame settings to generate enough heat to melt any ice buildup and clear the vent. However, if this becomes a recurring problem every time temperatures drop below -20 degrees, you likely need a more permanent fix. The most effective solution is installing a vertical vent termination kit that extends your vent pipe higher above the roofline, allowing the exhaust to disperse before cooling enough to condense. Another option is adding insulated vent pipe sections near the termination point to maintain higher exhaust temperatures.

Critical warning: Never ignore signs of vent blockage like unusual flame patterns, sooting on the glass, or the fireplace shutting down unexpectedly. A blocked vent can cause carbon monoxide to back up into your home, which is deadly. If you suspect a serious ice blockage and your fireplace won't operate normally, turn off the unit immediately and have it inspected by a TSSA-licensed gas fitter before using it again.

For recurring condensation issues, you can browse experienced gas fireplace technicians through the Ottawa Construction Network directory who understand how our extreme climate affects venting systems and can recommend the best solution for your specific installation.

Q3

Should I run my fireplace during an Ottawa derecho-style storm and will it work if I lose power for days?

Do not run your fireplace during a derecho or severe windstorm in Ottawa. High winds create dangerous downdrafts and unpredictable air pressure changes that can blow smoke and carbon monoxide back into your

home, even with normally well-functioning chimneys.

Ottawa's derechos — like the devastating May 2022 storm with winds exceeding 130 km/h — create extremely hazardous conditions for any fuel-burning fireplace or stove. The violent wind shears and sudden pressure changes can overwhelm your chimney's natural draft, forcing combustion gases back down the flue and into your living space. Even worse, flying debris can damage chimney caps, spark arrestors, or the chimney crown itself during the storm, compromising the entire venting system. Wait until winds subside to at least 30 km/h or less before lighting any fire.

Gas fireplaces will not work during power outages unless they have a battery backup or manual pilot light system. Most modern direct-vent gas fireplaces installed in Ottawa homes since 2010 use electronic ignition and require electricity to operate the ignition system, blower fans, and safety controls. However, some gas fireplace models do offer battery backup systems or standing pilot lights that allow operation during power outages — these are particularly valuable features for Ottawa homes given our frequent ice storms and wind events that knock out power for days.

Wood stoves and wood-burning fireplaces are your best bet for heat during extended Ottawa power outages, but only after the storm passes. A properly installed wood stove can heat 1,000 to 2,500 square feet depending on the model and your home's insulation, making it a genuine backup heating source during those multi-day January ice storms that leave thousands without power. The key is having properly seasoned hardwood stored and ready — you'll burn through 1/4 to 1/2 cord per week if you're relying on wood heat as your primary source during a prolonged outage.

Before the next major storm, identify which type of fireplace system you have and understand its power requirements. If you're considering a fireplace specifically for emergency heating during Ottawa's frequent power outages, prioritize a wood stove or wood-burning insert with a WETT-certified installation, or a gas fireplace with battery backup capability.

When you're ready to explore backup heating options that work during power outages, you can browse experienced fireplace installers through the Ottawa Construction Network directory who understand both Ottawa's severe weather patterns and the emergency heating needs of local homeowners.

Q4

Is it worth paying for a chimney cap before Ottawa's spring rain season to prevent water damage?

A chimney cap installed before Ottawa's spring rain season is one of the smartest preventive investments you can make — it absolutely pays for itself in avoided water damage and deterioration, especially given how much freeze-thaw cycling your chimney will face once the snow melts and rain begins in April.

Here's why this matters specifically in Ottawa's climate: Spring is when the most serious water damage to chimneys happens. As snow melts and April rains arrive, water runs down your roof and pours into the open top of your chimney if there's no cap. That water then saturates the mortar joints, brick, and the flue liner. When the next cold snap hits — and Ottawa often sees temperature swings of 20 degrees or more between day and night in April and May — that water freezes and expands inside the masonry, widening cracks and accelerating the freeze-thaw spalling cycle that can reduce a sound chimney to a crumbling hazard within a decade. A single season of water infiltration can cause damage equivalent to years of normal weathering. By installing a cap now, before the heavy spring rains begin, you prevent that initial saturation and protect your chimney from the worst of the seasonal damage cycle.

A quality chimney cap costs $200 to $600 installed in Ottawa — a copper or stainless steel cap at the higher end of that range will last 30+ years and look great while doing it. Compare that to the cost of chimney relining ($2,000 to $5,000), chimney crown repair ($300 to $1,200), or tuckpointing and waterproofing work ($500 to $2,500 or more) that becomes necessary when water damage progresses. A cap pays for itself many times over.

The ideal cap design for Ottawa has a peaked or sloped top to shed water quickly, proper spacing around the flue pipe to allow moisture to escape, and sturdy construction from corrosion-resistant material (304 stainless steel is excellent, or copper if you prefer the aesthetic and don't mind the green patina over time). Cheap galvanized steel caps rust out within 5 to 8 years in Ottawa's moisture-heavy climate and become a false economy.

An important consideration: before installing a cap, have a qualified chimney technician inspect the chimney crown — the concrete cap at the top where the flue pipe emerges. If the crown is already cracked or deteriorated, the cap alone won't solve the problem. A compromised crown allows water to migrate behind the cap and into the chimney structure. If crown damage is present, repair the crown first ($300 to $1,200), then install the cap. A WETT-certified chimney sweep can assess the crown condition during a Level 1 inspection ($250 to $450) and give you a clear picture of what needs to be done.

One more thing: if your chimney has a clay tile flue liner that's cracked (a common problem in Ottawa's climate), a cap alone won't prevent water from entering the flue itself — you'll eventually need to reline the chimney with stainless steel. But a cap still prevents the most damaging water infiltration to the external masonry and buys you

time before relining becomes urgent.

This is genuinely worth doing now. Spring rains are just weeks away, and installation is straightforward for a professional. If you'd like to get quotes from experienced fireplace professionals who specialize in chimney work and can assess your specific cap and crown needs, you can browse contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory at justynrookcontracting.com/directory.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

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Q5

How much should I budget for frost heave repairs to my outdoor fireplace foundation in Ottawa?

Frost heave damage to an outdoor fireplace foundation in Ottawa is one of the most serious and costly chimney problems you can face — and it's almost entirely predictable given the region's extreme freeze-thaw cycle. The honest answer is that repair costs depend heavily on the extent of heaving, whether the foundation has shifted, and whether the structure is still salvageable, but you should budget **$3,000 to $15,000 or more** for significant frost heave repairs, with complete foundation replacement potentially reaching $20,000 to $30,000.

Why Ottawa's Climate Makes Frost Heave Inevitable

Ottawa's frost penetration depth of 1.2 to 1.5 metres, combined with 50 or more freeze-thaw cycles per winter, creates uniquely harsh conditions for outdoor fireplace foundations. When soil contains moisture — which it almost always does near a foundation — that water expands roughly 9 percent each time temperatures drop below freezing. Over a winter with dozens of freeze-thaw cycles, this repeated expansion and contraction literally lifts the foundation upward (heaving), then allows it to settle unevenly as temperatures warm. A foundation that heaves 1 to

2 centimetres per winter may shift 20 to 30 centimetres over a decade, causing catastrophic cracking, tilting, and structural failure.

The problem is compounded by the fact that most outdoor fireplace foundations in Ottawa were built decades ago using methods that don't account for modern climate patterns or lack adequate drainage. Many sit directly on native soil without frost-protected footings (footings should extend below the frost line, which in Ottawa means at least 1.5 metres deep). Water collects in the soil around the foundation, freezes, heaves, and the cycle repeats.

What You'll Actually See (And What It Costs to Fix)

Minor frost heave — the foundation has shifted slightly but the structure is still sound — may show as small cracks in the foundation concrete or mortar and slight tilting of the chimney. Repairs might involve injecting epoxy into small cracks, installing helical piers or adjustable posts under the structure to re-level it, and improving drainage around the foundation. This category of work typically costs **$3,000 to $8,000** and can sometimes prevent more serious damage if caught early.

Moderate frost heave — the foundation has shifted 2 to 5 centimetres, visible cracks are present, and the chimney is noticeably tilting — usually requires underpinning the foundation (installing support posts or piers deep below the frost line to stabilize the structure) and possibly repairing significant structural damage to the fireplace itself. These projects run **$8,000 to $15,000**.

Severe frost heave — the foundation has heaved significantly, the chimney is severely cracked or tilted beyond safe operation, and structural integrity is compromised — may necessitate complete foundation replacement, which means removing the existing structure, excavating the old foundation, pouring a new foundation with proper frost protection (including below-frost-line footings, drainage tile, and a sump pump if needed), and rebuilding the chimney. This category of work easily reaches **$15,000 to $30,000 or more**, depending on the size of the fireplace and whether the chimney above the foundation can be salvaged.

The Real Cost Driver: Inspection First

Before you can know what to budget, you need a professional assessment. A foundation specialist (civil engineer or experienced masonry contractor) will typically charge **$400 to $800 for a detailed inspection** to determine how much the foundation has heaved, whether it's actively heaving, and what the repair options are. This is money well spent because it prevents you from guessing or, worse, attempting repairs that don't address the root cause.

The inspection will reveal whether the foundation is sitting on proper frost-protected footings (it probably isn't, if it's an older structure) and identify the drainage situation — whether water is being properly diverted away from the foundation or collecting around it. Improving drainage alone — installing or rerouting downspouts, grading the soil away from the foundation, and installing perimeter drainage tile — costs **$500 to $2,000** and can prevent future

heaving if caught before structural failure occurs.

Prevention Is Far Cheaper Than Repair

If you're building a new outdoor fireplace or rebuilding an existing one after frost heave damage, the investment in proper foundation design is genuinely worth it. A properly built foundation with footings extending at least 1.5 metres below grade (below the frost line), perimeter drainage tile, gravel fill for drainage, and proper grading costs roughly **10 to 20 percent more than a poorly built one** — perhaps an extra $1,000 to $3,000 on a foundation project — but it will function for decades without heaving. Compare that to spending $15,000 to $30,000 on frost heave repairs fifteen years later.

Important Timing Consideration

Frost heave repairs should ideally be scheduled for late spring or summer (June through August) when soil has thawed and temperatures are stable. Attempting foundation work during the shoulder seasons or winter when frost is still in the ground — or when temperatures are fluctuating around freezing — can result in the repaired foundation moving again almost immediately. If your outdoor fireplace is already severely damaged by frost heave, you may need to leave it out of service until weather permits proper repair work.

For a detailed assessment and quotes on frost heave repair from experienced foundation specialists and masonry professionals who understand Ottawa's unique frost conditions, you can browse fireplace and chimney contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory. They can evaluate your specific situation and provide realistic repair timelines and costs based on what they find.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- Luxe Painting and Renovations
- The Egress Group Inc
- Procore Foundation Repair
- Diamond renovations
- Demontigny Carpentry

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Q6

What's the best way to store firewood outside in Ottawa so it's dry and ready by November?

The best way to store firewood in Ottawa is to stack it off the ground on a level, well-draining surface, cover only the top to shed rain and snow, leave the sides completely open to allow wind circulation, position it at least 5 metres away from your house, and stack it in loose rows rather than dense piles so air can flow through the entire stack. Done correctly, wood will season effectively through spring and summer, reaching the ideal 15 to 20 percent moisture content needed for clean, efficient burning by the time winter arrives.

Why Ottawa's Climate Makes Firewood Storage Critical

Ottawa's short outdoor burning season and long, intense winter mean that firewood quality directly impacts how much heat you get, how much creosote accumulates in your chimney, and whether you can actually enjoy your fireplace or wood stove in November. Wet or green wood (above 30 percent moisture) produces massive amounts of creosote — that sticky, flammable coating that builds up inside your chimney and becomes a serious chimney fire risk. Properly seasoned wood burns hotter, produces less smoke, generates far less creosote, and heats your home far more efficiently. In Ottawa, where many people rely on wood stoves or fireplaces for supplemental heating during the coldest months, the difference between well-seasoned and poorly seasoned wood is the difference between comfort and frustration.

The Right Storage Setup

Start by choosing a location that gets good air circulation and drains well — avoid low spots where water pools, the shaded north side of buildings, or areas where snow drifts accumulate. Lay down a foundation of wooden pallets, concrete blocks, or pressure-treated sleepers to lift the wood at least 4 to 6 inches off the ground. Direct ground contact traps moisture underneath the stack and invites insects and rot. Create parallel rows running east to west (so prevailing winds blow across the stack), space the rows 12 to 18 inches apart to allow air movement, and stack wood loosely rather than jamming pieces tightly together — air circulation is everything.

Cover only the top of the stack with a waterproof tarp, metal roof, or wooden frame covered with tar paper or roofing material. The critical mistake most people make is covering the sides as well — this traps moisture inside the stack and actually prevents seasoning. Rain that falls on exposed sides runs down and drains out naturally, but the open sides let wind dry the wood continuously. Think of it like a roof over a house — the walls are open to air but the roof keeps the bulk of rain off.

Stack wood in straight lines rather than haphazard piles, and keep the height to 4 to 5 feet so the weight doesn't crush wood at the bottom and allow easier access when you need to grab wood for burning. In Ottawa, where ice and heavy snow are inevitable, avoid stacking higher than 5 feet — winter snow load can collapse an unstable

stack, and you do not want to be dismantling a frozen pile of wood in January.

Seasoning Timeline for Ottawa

Wood cut in spring or early summer will season through the summer months and should reach burnability (15 to 20 percent moisture) by fall, assuming it is hardwood (oak, maple, ash) rather than softwood (pine, spruce). Softwood seasons faster but produces more creosote and is generally not ideal for fireplaces or wood stoves — hardwood is worth seeking out. Hardwood cut in September or October will not dry sufficiently by November; plan on using that wood the following winter season instead. If you are buying firewood, ask the seller when it was cut and stack it immediately so it has several months to season before you burn it.

Test moisture with an inexpensive moisture meter (available at hardware stores for $25 to $50) — wood below 20 percent moisture is ready to burn. Dry wood sounds crisp when struck together (wet wood thuds dully), has visible cracks along the grain ends, has bark that separates easily, and feels noticeably lighter than freshly cut wood.

Storage Mistakes That Ruin Wood

Never cover the sides of your stack — trapped moisture means the wood never dries. Never stack wood directly on soil or grass — ground moisture wicks upward and prevents the bottom of the stack from seasoning. Never store wood in a completely enclosed shed or garage where humidity is high and air circulation is poor — the wood will dry slowly if at all. Never mix green and seasoned wood in the same stack — you will end up burning some unseasoned wood without realizing it. Never store firewood against the house or within 2 to 3 metres of it — insects, spiders, and rodents living in the wood pile will migrate into your home, and decaying wood near the foundation invites rot and moisture problems.

Distance From the House

Keep firewood at least 5 metres (roughly 16 feet) from your home's walls, foundation, and windows. Firewood piles attract insects (carpenter ants, termites, beetles) and rodents (mice, squirrels, rats) that will naturally migrate to your house when temperatures drop in autumn. The closer the wood to your home, the easier it is for these creatures to move indoors. In Ottawa winters, a mouse nest in your walls or attic is a genuine problem, so this distance is not arbitrary — it is practical pest management.

Late-Season Stacking

If you find yourself purchasing firewood in September or October because your spring supply is depleted, stack it immediately and plan to use it the following winter. Trying to dry wood between October and November is unrealistic in Ottawa — fall humidity is high, daylight is declining, and temperatures are cool. Any wood you purchase after August should be budgeted as next-season fuel. This is why smart Ottawa homeowners order

firewood in spring or early summer when it has half the year to season.

When you are ready to move firewood inside for burning, bring in only what you will burn in the next few days to avoid bringing insects indoors and to prevent water tracking into your home.

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- Homeupgraders
- RenoMotion Inc.
- Procore Foundation Repair
- Edenza Landscaping
- ALM Construction & Landscaping Inc.

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Q7

Does running my fireplace all winter make my Ottawa home too dry and what does a humidifier setup cost?

Running your fireplace all winter in Ottawa can absolutely contribute to excessive dryness in your home, though the relationship is more complex than people usually assume — it depends on how much you use it, what type of fireplace you have, and how well your home is sealed.

Why fireplaces dry out Ottawa homes

An open masonry fireplace is essentially a powerful exhaust fan that pulls warm, humid indoor air up the chimney and exhausts it outside, replacing it with cold, dry outside air that your heating system then has to warm up. This process, called "exfiltration," is the primary dryness culprit. A wood-burning fireplace operating at typical efficiency removes roughly 500 to 800 cubic feet of conditioned indoor air per hour through the chimney — that is a massive volume of humid air being constantly replaced by the ultra-dry Ottawa winter air (which has humidity levels as low as 5 to 10 percent when heated indoors). If you run your fireplace frequently throughout January, February, and March, you are actively pulling moisture out of your home.

Gas fireplaces, especially direct-vent models, are better in this regard. A direct-vent gas fireplace draws combustion air from outside through a sealed pipe, so it does not pull conditioned indoor air up the chimney the way a wood-burning fireplace does. However, even gas fireplaces create some dryness because the combustion process itself produces dry heat and because any fireplace use increases overall air circulation through your home's mechanical systems.

The real dryness problem in most Ottawa homes is not actually the fireplace — it is winter heating itself. When you heat cold outdoor air from -25 degrees Celsius (which might have an absolute humidity of 1 gram of water per cubic metre) indoors to +21 degrees, the relative humidity plummets to 10 to 20 percent even without a fireplace running. This is a thermodynamic reality of Ottawa winters, and it affects every home in the city, fireplace or not. That said, running a fireplace frequently does make an already-dry situation worse.

Health and comfort impacts

Indoor humidity below 30 percent is genuinely uncomfortable — it causes dry skin, chapped lips, sinus irritation, and respiratory discomfort, especially for children and people with asthma or allergies. Extremely low humidity (below 20 percent) also stresses wooden furniture, hardwood floors, and musical instruments by causing them to shrink and crack. Most people feel most comfortable at 35 to 50 percent relative humidity.

Humidifier costs in Ottawa

A whole-home humidifier system integrated into your forced-air furnace is the most effective solution if you have ducted heating. Installation typically costs $1,500 to $3,500 including the unit, labour, ductwork connections, and a humidistat control. Popular models include the Aprilaire 700 (around $800 to $1,200 installed) and Honeywell HE360 (similar price range). These systems add moisture directly to the air flowing through your furnace, maintaining consistent humidity throughout the house. Running cost is minimal — just the cost of water going down the drain plus a small amount of electricity.

Portable ultrasonic or evaporative humidifiers cost $150 to $600 for decent-quality units and work well for individual rooms, but they require daily water refilling and maintenance, and they do not humidify the whole home effectively. They are useful as supplemental devices in bedrooms or sitting rooms where you spend the most time.

Practical steps to address winter dryness without major expense

Before investing in a whole-home humidifier, try these lower-cost strategies: run your fireplace less frequently — use it for ambiance and supplemental heat on weekends rather than every evening; ensure your fireplace damper is fully closed when the fire is completely out (the damper should never be left open overnight or when the fireplace is not in use, as this creates continuous exfiltration); use a direct-vent gas fireplace instead of wood-burning if you are planning a new installation, since it will have far less impact on home humidity; improve air sealing around doors and windows to reduce infiltration of dry outside air, though this is a larger project; and hang damp towels in living areas or run a small portable humidifier in your bedroom at night.

Plants also help — they release moisture through transpiration. A collection of houseplants in rooms where you spend the most time will modestly improve humidity without any cost beyond watering them.

The real solution for serious fireplace users

If you plan to use your fireplace as a significant heating source throughout the winter — burning a wood stove 6 to 8 hours daily or running a gas fireplace multiple hours every evening — installing a whole-home humidifier becomes far more worthwhile. The investment of $1,500 to $3,500 is reasonable insurance against the respiratory discomfort, skin irritation, and potential damage to furnishings and home materials that accompany Ottawa's brutal winter dryness. Get a quote from an HVAC contractor who can assess your specific furnace setup, ductwork, and home size to recommend the right capacity humidifier for your needs.

If you are looking to connect with an experienced HVAC or fireplace installer in Ottawa who can advise on both fireplace selection and humidity management, you can browse local contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory at justynrookcontracting.com/directory.

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- Coliseum concrete & interlock
- Vanguard Environmental

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Q8

Will my gas fireplace still work during an Ottawa ice storm power outage for backup heat?

It depends entirely on the type of gas fireplace you have — and this is a critical distinction in Ottawa, where ice storms can leave thousands without power for days or weeks at a time.

Direct-vent gas fireplaces with electronic ignition and blower fans will NOT work during a power outage. These units require electricity to operate the spark ignition system, electronic valve controls, and the blower fan that circulates heated air into the room. The moment the power goes out, so does your fireplace. Many Ottawa homeowners discover this uncomfortable reality during the 1998 ice storm or during recent winter power outages, when they flip the switch expecting heat and get nothing. If backup heat during a grid failure is a priority for you, a gas fireplace with electronic controls is not the answer.

Vent-free (ventless) gas fireplaces are not available in Ontario, so this is not an option. The Ontario Building Code restricts vent-free gas appliances due to air quality and moisture concerns, especially in tightly sealed modern homes.

A wood stove or fireplace insert burning seasoned firewood, by contrast, will work perfectly during a power outage — wood burns regardless of whether the electrical grid is functioning. This is the single biggest advantage wood-burning appliances have over gas in Ottawa's climate. If you live in an area with a history of ice storms or extended winter power outages (which includes much of Ottawa, particularly the rural areas around Kanata, Barrhaven, and the eastern communities), a wood stove provides genuinely reliable backup heat when the grid fails. You will not be sitting in a cold dark house if you have split, seasoned firewood stacked and ready.

The Real Consideration for Ottawa

Ottawa's freeze-thaw cycle and ice storms are not theoretical risks — they are seasonal certainties. The 1998 ice storm left some neighbourhoods without power for up to three weeks. More recently, severe winter weather has knocked out power for 48 to 72 hours across parts of the city multiple times. If your gas fireplace is your primary supplemental heating system and the power goes out for an extended period, you will lose heat at the exact moment you need it most, when outdoor temperatures are at their lowest and your home's heating load is highest.

If you are seriously considering a gas fireplace for supplemental heating in Ottawa, ask yourself honestly whether you have reliable alternative heat sources if the power fails. Central forced-air furnaces also depend on electricity, so if your furnace is your only heat, a power outage during a winter storm becomes a genuine safety issue, especially for families with young children, elderly relatives, or anyone with health vulnerabilities. A backup wood stove or fireplace insert is not a luxury in Ottawa — it is a practical hedge against the climate and grid failures that Ottawa experiences regularly.

A practical middle path: Some homeowners in Ottawa install both a gas fireplace (for convenience and ambiance on normal days) and a wood stove as a separate backup system. The wood stove sits idle most of the time, but when the power goes out or the grid becomes unreliable, it becomes invaluable. Wood stove installation in Ottawa runs $4,500 to $9,500 installed depending on whether you need a new chimney or can use an existing one. Over a 20-year ownership period, that represents genuine insurance against both extended power outages and the anxiety that comes with knowing you have no backup heat if the grid fails during Ottawa's coldest weeks.

If you are planning a fireplace installation and want to explore options that prioritize backup heating capability during Ottawa ice storms, or if you want to compare the advantages of gas versus wood in your specific situation, the Ottawa Construction Network directory can connect you with experienced fireplace professionals who understand Ottawa's unique climate challenges and can help you design a heating approach that works for your home and risk tolerance.

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Q9

Can ice dams on my Ottawa roof cause chimney damage or water leaking into the firebox?

Ice dams are absolutely a threat to your chimney and fireplace, especially in Ottawa's extreme climate where roof ice buildup is nearly guaranteed every winter. Yes, ice dams can damage your chimney structure and allow water to leak into the firebox and surrounding areas — this is one of the most common winter fireplace problems I see in the National Capital Region.

How Ice Dams Damage Chimneys

An ice dam forms when warm air from inside your home melts snow on the roof, the water runs down to the colder eaves, refreezes into a solid ice ridge, and then backs up behind that dam. As the dam grows, water pools against your chimney base, the flashing where the chimney meets the roof, and the lower courses of masonry. In Ottawa's climate, where temperatures regularly cycle above and below zero multiple times per winter, that pooled water repeatedly freezes and thaws, expanding about 9 percent each time it freezes. This freeze-thaw pressure works into every microscopic pore and crack in your mortar joints and brick face. Over weeks of cycling, it widens cracks, breaks apart mortar, spalls brick faces, and deteriorates the chimney from the inside out — all directly related to the ice dam pressing water against it.

The damage to your flashing is equally serious. The flashing is the metal seal that bridges the gap between the chimney and the roof. When water pools behind an ice dam, it gets under the flashing, corrodes it from underneath, and eventually allows water to run down into the walls, attic, and interior spaces adjacent to the chimney. If you have a fireplace directly below, water can leak through the brick, down the exterior chimney walls, and into the firebox area, damaging the interior of your fireplace and potentially rotting wood framing inside the wall cavity.

The chimney crown — the concrete or mortar cap at the very top of your chimney — can also suffer ice dam consequences. When water pooling at the base of the chimney freezes solid, that ice can extend partway up the chimney exterior. If that ice is pressed tightly against the crown, repeated freeze-thaw cycling can crack the crown. Additionally, if water has infiltrated behind the flashing and runs down the inside of the chimney cavity (between the chimney exterior wall and the flue liner), it freezes inside the chimney space itself, creating pressure that can crack the mortar joints and push the chimney out of plumb over time.

What to Watch For

The telltale signs of ice dam damage to your chimney include water stains on the interior chimney face or surrounding interior walls, visible cracks in exterior chimney masonry (especially horizontal cracks in mortar joints), spalling (brick faces breaking away in flat chips), white powder or efflorescence (salt deposits) on the lower

chimney exterior after an ice dam melts, water pooling or ice buildup visibly against the base of the chimney, and damp smell or discoloration inside the firebox or fireplace opening. If you notice any of these, get a WETT inspection scheduled for spring — a Level 2 inspection ($350 to $600) is appropriate if you suspect water damage.

Prevention & Management

The best ice dam prevention is proper attic insulation and ventilation. If your attic is too warm, heat escapes through the roof, melts the snow, and starts the dam-forming cycle. A well-insulated, properly vented attic stays closer to outdoor temperature, and snow doesn't melt. This is a broader home maintenance issue, but it directly protects your chimney. Ensure your attic has adequate insulation (R-38 to R-50 depending on whether you're insulating the floor or the roof), proper air sealing to prevent warm air leaks, and unobstructed airflow through soffit vents and ridge vents.

Keep gutters clear of debris so water can flow freely instead of backing up and creating ice dams. In Ottawa, this often means clearing gutters in both fall and early winter. Some homeowners use heat tape (electric heating cables) along the gutter line and downspouts during winter — these cost $100 to $300 and can prevent dam formation in vulnerable spots, though they use electricity and add maintenance.

Never use salt on your roof or directly on chimney masonry to melt ice dams — salt accelerates brick deterioration, corrodes flashing, and damages mortar. If you must physically remove ice from around your chimney base, use a plastic shovel or roof rake and do not strike the chimney itself.

Flashing & Crown Protection

Have your chimney flashing inspected every spring and fall. If flashing is separating from the chimney, corroded, or visibly compromised, it needs to be re-sealed or replaced immediately — a roofer or chimney contractor can do this for $300 to $800 depending on the chimney size. Make sure your chimney crown is in good condition and properly sloped so water runs off rather than pooling. If your crown is cracked, deteriorated, or missing sections, those repairs ($300 to $1,200 for typical crown work) should be prioritized before winter.

Waterproofing your chimney exterior with a breathable masonry sealer ($250 to $600 applied by a chimney contractor) can help reduce water absorption into brick and mortar. This is especially valuable in Ottawa because it reduces the damage from freeze-thaw cycles, though it is not a substitute for fixing damaged flashing or crown.

Getting a professional WETT Level 1 inspection ($250 to $450) in early spring, right after ice dam season ends, allows you to catch ice dam damage before it spreads to the firebox, interior walls, or structural framing. If you are concerned about existing damage, a Level 2 inspection provides a more thorough assessment. Many fireplace contractors in the Ottawa area are experienced with ice dam damage evaluation and can advise on whether your specific situation requires repair work now or if monitoring is appropriate.

If ice dam damage has already caused water leaks into your home, document it with photos for your insurance claim and get a professional assessment of both the chimney and the interior water damage before pursuing repairs.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- Homeupgraders
- RenoMotion Inc.
- L.L. Renovation
- Floor-2-Wall Inc
- ARTEXPRO Tile & Finishes

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Q10

My chimney liner cracked mid-January during an Ottawa cold snap — how much does emergency repair cost?

A cracked chimney liner discovered mid-winter in Ottawa is a serious safety issue that needs prompt attention, and emergency repair costs will run **$2,500 to $6,500 or more depending on whether you need a full reline or a temporary containment fix**. If you're currently using the fireplace or wood stove, you should stop immediately until a WETT-certified chimney professional has inspected it — a cracked liner allows dangerous carbon monoxide and combustion gases to seep into your walls and living spaces, and it can also allow water into the chimney structure during the thaw cycle.

Here's what's actually happening inside your chimney right now. January cold snaps in Ottawa push temperatures to -25 or colder, and a crack in your clay tile or stainless steel liner becomes a path for combustion gases to escape the flue into the spaces between the liner and the chimney masonry. If those gases reach a wall cavity, they can accumulate in your home. Simultaneously, any moisture on the liner's surface begins to freeze, expand (ice is about 9 percent larger by volume than water), and widen the crack further. The freeze-thaw cycle you're experiencing right now is the worst possible time for a cracked liner to exist — it's actively getting worse with every temperature swing.

The cost difference between emergency mid-winter work and spring repair is significant. A full chimney reline with stainless steel typically costs **$2,000 to $5,000 during regular season**, but emergency winter work often incurs 25 to 40 percent premiums because contractors have to navigate snow and ice on the roof, work in subzero temperatures where materials behave differently, and often reschedule other jobs. You may also pay emergency service fees ($300 to $800) if you need someone to come within 24 to 48 hours rather than waiting for the next available appointment. If the crack is in a clay tile liner (common in older Ottawa chimneys), a full reline is typically the only permanent solution — partial repairs or patching products do not hold up long-term in this climate.

Your immediate options are: (1) **Full reline now** — stainless steel relining ($3,000 to $6,500 installed in winter emergency conditions) removes the cracked liner and installs a seamless stainless steel replacement that will perform reliably for 20+ years. This is the safest and ultimately most cost-effective solution. (2) **Temporary containment** — a qualified chimney professional can install an inflatable chimney plug or temporary cap that prevents combustion gases from entering the chimney space entirely, allowing you to safely use the fireplace until spring ($400 to $800). This buys you time to schedule the reline when contractors are busier and prices are lower, typically saving $500 to $1,500 compared to emergency winter rates. (3) **Stop using the fireplace** — if the crack is severe or if you're uncertain about its extent, simply not using the appliance until spring eliminates the risk entirely and gives you time to get competitive bids.

Critical considerations: Before any work begins, you must have a WETT-certified chimney professional inspect the crack with a camera or borescope to determine its exact location, extent, and whether it affects the structural masonry surrounding the liner. A Level 2 WETT inspection costs $350 to $600 and will give you and potential contractors complete information. Do not assume the liner can be patched or sealed — Ottawa's temperature extremes and moisture conditions make sealants and patches temporary solutions that typically fail within one to three seasons. If you see water stains on interior walls near the chimney during the January thaw, the crack may have already allowed water into the wall cavity, which creates a secondary moisture and mold risk that requires additional remediation.

The emotional urgency of losing a fireplace in the middle of winter is real — but the practical reality is that a temporary plug costs a fraction of emergency winter relining and keeps you safe while you shop for the best contractor and price. If you want to move forward with a permanent fix now, get written quotes from at least two WETT-certified chimney contractors that specify whether they're quoting winter emergency rates and exactly when they can access your roof. You can browse fireplace and chimney contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory when you're ready to get professional assessments on the crack and your options.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- Justyn Rook Contracting
- The Egress Group Inc
- Elie The Carpet Guy Inc.
- Home Front Services
- Vanguard Environmental

View all contractors ?

Q11

What's a good fall pre-season fireplace checklist before Ottawa's first cold snap in October?

A fall pre-season fireplace checklist is essential in Ottawa because waiting until the first cold snap in late September or October means joining the rush of homeowners desperate for repairs before winter hits — and honest professionals are booked solid by then. Smart Ottawa homeowners tackle their fireplace and chimney

maintenance in August and September when contractors still have availability and the weather cooperates for outdoor work.

Critical Pre-Season Tasks

For wood-burning fireplaces and stoves: Get a professional WETT Level 1 chimney inspection and cleaning by a certified chimney sweep ($250 to $450). This is non-negotiable in Ottawa — your long burning season and heavy firewood consumption create significant creosote buildup, especially if you burn through shoulder seasons at low temperatures. A chimney fire in October is a genuine disaster. While you're at it, visually inspect your chimney from the ground for obvious damage: missing or cracked chimney cap, visible mortar deterioration, missing bricks, or water stains on the exterior. Check that your damper opens and closes smoothly without sticking — if it's sluggish, have a professional clean or repair it before you need it. Inspect your firebox for cracks in the firebox liner or hearth. Test your carbon monoxide detector to make sure it works, and install a new battery if needed.

For gas fireplaces: Schedule a professional gas fireplace service call ($150 to $250) with a TSSA-licensed gas fitter or qualified technician. They will clean the burner assembly, inspect the igniter, test the thermostat and wall switch for responsiveness, check the venting system for obstructions or damage, and verify that there is no carbon monoxide leakage. Clean the fireplace glass yourself using only manufacturer-recommended glass cleaner — never use household glass cleaner or abrasive scrubbers, which damage the special high-temperature coating on gas fireplace doors. Check that the remote control batteries are fresh, and verify that all controls respond properly. Inspect the venting termination cap on your roof (from ground level with binoculars) for debris, bird nests, or damage.

For all fireplace types: Walk around the exterior of your chimney and look for water damage indicators: dark staining on brick or mortar, efflorescence (white powdery deposits), mortar joints that crumble when you touch them lightly, or spalling (flaking or chunks missing from brick faces). These are signs of freeze-thaw damage, and in Ottawa's climate they need professional attention before winter. Apply a good quality masonry water repellent or chimney sealant ($250 to $600 installed) if your chimney shows any water vulnerability — this is your insurance policy against Ottawa's brutal cycle of melting snow, rain, and deep freezing. Check the chimney flashing where the chimney meets the roofline (from ground level) for visible gaps, rust, or separation — water leaks at the flashing can damage both the chimney interior and your attic. Make sure your chimney cap is intact and secure; a missing or damaged cap is an open door for rain, snow, leaves, and animals to damage your flue.

Firewood preparation: If you burn wood, ensure you have enough seasoned hardwood stacked and stored by mid-September. Wood needs 12 to 18 months of proper seasoning to reach the 15 to 20 percent moisture content necessary for clean, efficient burning. Your stack should be off the ground on concrete blocks or gravel, covered on top to shed rain and snow, but open on the sides to allow air circulation. Store it at least 5 metres from your house to prevent pest entry. Never bring unseasoned or green wood inside — burning wet wood produces catastrophic

amounts of creosote and barely heats your home.

Indoor fireplace area: Ensure your hearth extension meets code (at least 16 inches in front of the fireplace opening and 8 inches on either side for wood stoves), and verify that there are no flammable items stored within the clearance zone — furniture, curtains, blankets, or wall decorations should be at least 12 inches away from the fireplace opening. Check that any fireplace screen or grate is in good condition and fits securely. Vacuum out any accumulated ash or debris from the summer.

The single biggest mistake Ottawa fireplace owners make is delaying their inspection until the first cold snap hits in October, then discovering they need a $4,000 chimney relining or a $2,500 chimney cap replacement and finding that every contractor is booked until December. A fall inspection costs $250 to $450 and takes a few hours — it is the best insurance you can buy against an emergency repair bill and a winter without reliable heat.

If your inspection uncovers issues that need professional attention — chimney relining, crown repair, flashing replacement, or complex structural work — you can browse experienced fireplace and chimney contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory to compare options and get work scheduled before the October rush hits.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- 613Bins
- The Egress Group Inc
- SDR Electric, Plumbing & Heating Inc.
- Treka Construction Group
- Canadian Masonry Services

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Q12

Should I close off my fireplace damper in summer to keep Ottawa humidity and bugs out of the house?

Yes, you should close your fireplace damper during summer, but do it correctly — a closed damper is an important part of summer fireplace maintenance in Ottawa, not an optional convenience. Closing the damper prevents humid

outdoor air from entering your home through the chimney, stops insects and birds from nesting in the flue, and prevents warm conditioned air from escaping up the chimney when your air conditioning is running.

Why This Matters in Ottawa's Climate

Ottawa's summer humidity can reach 70 to 80 percent, and that moisture-laden air flowing down through an open chimney into your living space adds real load to your air conditioning system and creates conditions for mold growth in damp basements and crawl spaces — especially problematic in older Ottawa homes with masonry foundations. The chimney acts as a giant ventilation shaft when the damper is open, creating stack effect that pulls humid air into your home and pulls cooled air out. Additionally, Ottawa's position near the Rideau Canal and Ottawa River means insects, particularly mosquitoes, wasps, and flying beetles, actively nest in chimneys during summer months. Birds — especially chimney swifts, which are protected under the Migratory Birds Convention Act — commonly nest in open flues from May through August. Once birds establish a nest, you cannot remove it until the nesting season ends, which can limit your fireplace use well into fall.

Closing the damper also prevents debris accumulation. Ottawa's high wind patterns during summer thunderstorms can drive leaves, twigs, and outdoor dust directly down into your firebox and onto your hearth, creating cleanup work and potentially introducing moisture and mold spores into the living space. An open damper on a hot summer day also allows warm, stale air to escape from your home while pulling in hot outdoor air — fighting your air conditioning system and wasting energy.

How to Close Your Damper Correctly

Most masonry fireplaces in older Ottawa homes have a simple damper operated by a handle or lever located inside the firebox at the base of the flue opening. To close it, simply push or pull the handle until you feel resistance and confirm that the damper plate has moved fully across the flue opening. You should be able to feel the seal with your hand — the damper should create an airtight closure. If the damper is stuck, difficult to move, or does not seal completely, this is a sign the damper mechanism needs professional inspection and possible repair.

Gas fireplaces with sealed combustion (direct-vent models that draw combustion air from outside) do not have operational dampers — the damper port is sealed, and there is nothing for you to close or open. This is one of the many advantages of direct-vent gas fireplaces in Ottawa's humid summers — there is no pathway for outside air, insects, or moisture to enter the home.

Wood stove chimneys cannot be damped from inside the stove the way a traditional fireplace damper works. Instead, if you have a wood stove, install a chimney cap with a damper mechanism or a spring-loaded top sealer that prevents downdrafts and insect entry while allowing any residual moisture to escape. These caps cost $200 to $600 and should be installed by a professional to ensure safe, weathertight fit.

Important Considerations

Before you close your damper for the season, have the fireplace and chimney inspected if you have not done so in the past year. A closed damper traps any moisture, creosote buildup, or debris that accumulated over the heating season inside the chimney. If there is significant moisture or organic matter inside, a sealed damper can actually accelerate mold growth or attract insects over time. A professional chimney sweep (WETT-certified recommended) will clean out debris and identify any moisture or ventilation issues before you seal the system for summer — this is a worthwhile $175 to $350 investment in spring.

One common mistake is closing the damper too early in spring or leaving it closed too late into fall. Ottawa's shoulder seasons (April, May, September, and October) are unpredictable — you may have warm days followed by cold nights where you want to use the fireplace. A good rule is to close the damper after the last time you expect to use the fireplace for the season and open it again about two weeks before you plan to light fires in fall. This allows any residual moisture in the chimney to dry out before you seal it and ensures proper ventilation when you resume use.

If you notice any difficulty operating the damper, rust or corrosion visible around the damper handle, or air leaking around the damper even when it is fully closed, have a professional chimney technician inspect and possibly repair or replace the damper. A properly functioning damper is essential for both summer comfort and winter safety.

Q13

How much does a spring chimney inspection cost in Ottawa after a rough freeze-thaw winter?

A Level 1 WETT inspection—the standard visual assessment that most Ottawa homeowners need after a harsh winter—costs between **$250 to $450** in the Ottawa area. If your chimney shows visible damage or you suspect problems during that inspection, a more detailed Level 2 inspection runs **$350 to $600** and involves a closer examination of the entire system including the flue interior, damper, and structural integrity. A full Level 3 invasive inspection, which requires partial disassembly to examine concealed areas, typically costs **$500 to $1,000 or more**.

Why This Matters in Ottawa's Climate

Spring inspections after Ottawa's extreme winters are genuinely important and worth the investment. Our freeze-thaw cycle is relentless—temperatures drop below zero 50 or more times per winter, and water that enters mortar joints, brick faces, and the chimney crown expands about 9 percent as it freezes. Over a single brutal winter, a sound chimney can develop serious cracks, spalling (where brick or mortar chunks break away), crown deterioration, and flashing leaks. After a particularly rough winter with temperatures hitting -30°C, heavy snow loads, and repeated thaw-freeze cycles, your chimney has taken real punishment.

The chimney crown—that concrete or mortar cap at the top—takes the worst of it. Ice buildup, thermal stress, and water penetration can crack a crown significantly in just one season. The flashing where the chimney meets the roofline is another critical area; ice dams and heavy snow load shifting can separate flashing or push it out of alignment, creating leaks that damage both the chimney and your home interior. A spring inspection catches these problems while there is still time to schedule repairs before next heating season.

Timing matters strategically. Most Ottawa chimney inspectors are busy with late-fall calls (September through November) when homeowners realize they need service before cold weather arrives. Spring is actually an ideal window—you'll get faster scheduling, and repairs completed in April or May mean your chimney will be solid and waterproofed before the next winter. If you schedule in late March or early April, you are working with contractors who have time to do the job properly rather than rushing through a backlog.

What a Spring Inspection Typically Covers

A Level 1 inspection includes visual examination of the exterior (crown, cap, flashing, visible brick or stone), a look inside the firebox, and a basic assessment of the damper or smoke chamber. The inspector will check for obvious cracks, spalling, deteriorated mortar, water stains, and creosote buildup. If you had the chimney cleaned in the fall, the inspector is largely assessing what winter did to it. A Level 2 inspection goes deeper—the sweep may use a camera to inspect the interior flue, test draft, examine damper operation, and assess whether the chimney is safe to

use during the coming heating season.

Don't skip the inspection just because you had one last fall. Winter changes things. A chimney that passed inspection in September may have developed a crack in the crown by April, especially if it was a harsh season. The inspection fee pays for peace of mind and early detection—catching a cracked crown in spring is far better than discovering a water leak inside your home in June or facing a dangerous flue obstruction when you light a fire next October.

A word on WETT certification: While Ontario law does not technically require a WETT-certified inspector (unlike the legal requirement for TSSA gas fitter licensing), virtually every insurance company in Ontario now requires proof of a WETT inspection before they will insure a home with a fireplace or wood stove. If you plan to sell your home, the buyer's inspector will almost certainly demand a WETT Level 2 inspection. Getting a WETT inspection now ensures your system is properly documented and will not create complications down the road.

If the inspection reveals damage—cracked crown, deteriorated flashing, spalling brick, or other issues—expect repair costs to range from **$300 to $1,200 for crown repair**, **$200 to $600 for cap replacement**, **$500 to $2,500 for tuckpointing damaged mortar**, or **$2,000 to $5,000 for stainless steel chimney relining** if the flue is compromised. Getting ahead of these issues in spring costs less and causes far fewer headaches than waiting until October and discovering problems when contractors are booked solid.

If you are looking to connect with a WETT-certified chimney inspector in Ottawa, you can browse local professionals through the Ottawa Construction Network directory who can schedule your spring inspection and discuss any repairs the assessment uncovers.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- 613Bins
- The Egress Group Inc
- Best Hand2Hand moving company
- Core Climate Ltd.
- Colonnade Security Inc

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Q14

What's the cost to install a chimney cap before Ottawa's fall season to keep out rain, snow, and nesting animals?

A chimney cap installation in Ottawa typically costs **$200 to $600** depending on the cap style, chimney dimensions, and whether your existing chimney crown needs repair work beforehand. For a straightforward cap replacement on a standard residential chimney, expect to pay in the $300 to $450 range, with labour running $150 to $300 and materials another $100 to $200. Premium stainless steel caps designed to handle Ottawa's harsh weather run $400 to $600 installed.

This is exactly the right time to schedule this work. Ottawa's fall season brings heavy rain, wet snow starting in October, and the arrival of birds, squirrels, raccoons, and other wildlife seeking shelter before winter — all of which target an unprotected chimney opening. A missing or deteriorated cap allows water to pour directly down the flue, soaking the chimney interior and accelerating freeze-thaw damage to masonry and liners. The destructive cycle starts immediately: water enters the chimney, freezes when temperatures drop below zero (which happens 50+ times per Ottawa winter), expands about 9 percent as ice, and cracks mortar and brick from the inside out. Over five to ten years, this turns a sound chimney into a crumbling liability.

Wildlife entry is equally serious. Raccoons, squirrels, and birds build nests inside unprotected chimneys, creating blockages that trap carbon monoxide in your home and preventing the flue from venting properly. A blocked chimney can make a gas fireplace unsafe to operate and will force you to hire a chimney sweep for emergency removal work — a much costlier intervention than a $400 cap installed in September.

What to expect before scheduling: Have your chimney inspected during the cap installation visit. If your chimney crown (the concrete or mortar cap at the very top where the chimney meets the roof) is cracked or deteriorating, your contractor should recommend repair work alongside the cap installation — a crown repair runs $300 to $1,200 depending on damage extent. A proper chimney cap sits on a sound crown; installing a cap on a damaged crown is like putting a roof on a house with rotting walls. If your flashing (the metal seal where the chimney meets the roofline) shows rust, gaps, or deterioration, add another $300 to $800 for flashing repair — this is another critical water leak point that compounds cap problems.

Stainless steel caps are the standard choice for Ottawa because they resist rust and corrosion better than galvanized steel or copper caps, which can deteriorate within five to ten years in our climate. Copper caps look beautiful and last longer (20+ years), but they cost $500 to $800 installed and may attract thieves in some neighbourhoods. Three-sided or four-sided cage-style caps with spark arrestors are ideal if you burn wood — they prevent embers from escaping while allowing proper draft. Solid or semi-solid caps designed for gas fireplaces are simpler and less expensive.

Critical timing note: Late August through mid-September is peak season for cap installations in Ottawa because homeowners are preparing for fall rain and early snow. Contractors book up quickly, so schedule now rather than waiting for October when the first cold snap hits and everyone calls for emergency chimney work. Spring (April through May) is the second-best window if you miss the fall deadline, but scheduling a cap installation in November or December is frustrating — it's cold, your roofer may refuse to work at height in icy conditions, and the job takes longer.

When you're ready to move forward, you can browse fireplace and chimney contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory at justynrookcontracting.com/directory to find experienced professionals in your area who handle cap installation and chimney inspection work.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- Justyn Rook Contracting
- RenoMotion Inc.
- Rrenovatios
- Humble Homes - property maintenance
- Best Hand2Hand moving company

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Q15

How do I stop cold air drafts coming down my fireplace flue during Ottawa's brutal February windchill nights?

Cold air drafting down through your fireplace flue on brutal Ottawa winter nights is one of the most common comfort complaints we hear, and it's a direct consequence of our extreme continental climate and high wind pressures. The good news is that you have several practical solutions, ranging from simple and cheap to more permanent and effective.

Why this happens in Ottawa specifically: Your chimney acts like a tall pipe open to the outside air, and during Ottawa's harshest nights—when windchill hits -35 or lower—the pressure differential between your warm living room and the freezing air above the roofline creates a powerful natural draft that pulls cold air down into your home. This effect is amplified in tightly sealed modern homes, where the interior is essentially a closed box with minimal

air leakage elsewhere. Wind tunneling along the Ottawa River valley or across exposed neighborhoods like Barrhaven or Kanata can intensify the problem dramatically. The cold air descends because it's denser than warm room air, and it finds the path of least resistance—straight down your chimney and into your firebox. If you have an open fireplace you're not actively using, you're essentially heating the outdoors.

The simplest immediate fix: a chimney balloon. A chimney balloon (also called an inflatable draft stopper) is a vinyl bladder that fits inside your flue and seals off the chimney opening when the fireplace is not in use. You inflate it partially with air, wedge it into the flue opening at the firebox, and it blocks cold air from descending. Cost is about $30 to $60, and they're widely available at hardware stores. The critical rule is this: **remove the balloon before you use the fireplace.** If you forget and light a fire with the balloon in place, you create a dangerous backflow situation where smoke and carbon monoxide get pushed into the room instead of up the chimney. Mark your fireplace with a bright sticker that says "REMOVE BALLOON BEFORE LIGHTING FIRE" if you install one. This solution is temporary and works well if you actively use your fireplace in winter and just want to stop drafts on nights you're not burning.

A permanent upgrade: install a chimney cap with a damper or closer. A standard chimney cap (the metal covering at the top of the chimney that keeps rain and animals out) does nothing to stop cold air drafts because it has ventilation openings on the sides. An upgraded cap with a motorized damper or manual closure device seals the chimney opening when not in use, completely stopping air infiltration. These run $400 to $800 installed in Ottawa. The motorized versions ($600 to $800) are convenient—you operate them via a wall switch or remote, and they open automatically when you light the fireplace and close when you're done burning. Manual dampers are cheaper ($300 to $500) but require you to remember to close them before leaving the room. This is a legitimate long-term investment if you use your fireplace regularly in winter and want to eliminate the draft problem entirely without managing a balloon every time.

If your fireplace is permanently closed: If you never use your fireplace and don't plan to, the most effective solution is a **top-sealing damper** installed by a professional chimney technician. This is a motorized damper mounted at the very top of the chimney that seals completely when closed, with a gasket and locking mechanism. Cost runs $500 to $1,000 installed. It's the gold standard for stopping drafts but requires a technician to install it safely at height. Alternatively, some homeowners permanently close off the fireplace by installing a **custom sealed cover** inside the firebox and covering the hearth opening with a decorative panel or fireplace insert—this converts the non-functional chimney into a sealed, draft-free space and often improves overall home comfort.

A secondary solution: improve your damper. If your fireplace has an older throat damper (a metal door inside the chimney just above the firebox), it may not seal tightly. An aging throat damper can leak significant cold air even when fully closed. Having a chimney technician inspect and potentially replace it with a modern, tighter-sealing damper costs $300 to $600 and may dramatically reduce drafts. WETT-certified chimney sweeps can assess this

during an inspection.

For active fireplace users: If you burn your fireplace regularly through Ottawa's winter, the draft problem is actually a sign that your fireplace is working—it's pulling combustion air from the room and exhausting it up the chimney. The coldness you feel comes from the pressure imbalance created by the fireplace actively venting. In this case, the balloon solution or motorized cap damper are your best options. Using the fireplace itself generates enough heat that the draft is less noticeable when there's an active fire, but the drafting intensifies dramatically the moment you let the fire die down and close the damper.

Important note on carbon monoxide: Never fully seal a fireplace opening or chimney if there's any possibility the fireplace might be used in the future without upgrading the damper first. An improperly sealed fireplace combined with burning a fire creates a carbon monoxide hazard. Any permanent sealing should involve a professional who understands the venting requirements of your specific appliance.

If you're dealing with an especially brutal draft and want to explore permanent solutions—whether a motorized cap damper, top-sealing damper, or professional assessment of your fireplace's condition—you can browse experienced chimney technicians and fireplace professionals through the Ottawa Construction Network directory, where you can review profiles and reach out directly to get quotes for your specific situation.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- Homeupgraders
- JC Carpentry
- Callandgone
- TIER 1 HVAC SERVICE'S INC
- Denys Builds Designs Renovations

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Q16

Is it worth running my fireplace as a backup heat source during Ottawa's January cold snaps to reduce furnace strain?

Yes, running a gas fireplace as a backup heat source during Ottawa's deep winter cold snaps can meaningfully reduce furnace strain and lower your heating costs — but only if your fireplace is sized appropriately, properly installed, and operated efficiently. A well-designed gas fireplace can contribute 15,000 to 50,000 BTU of heat depending on the model, which is roughly equivalent to 10 to 25 percent of your home's total heating demand during the coldest days.

The real value of a fireplace as supplemental heat during Ottawa's January extreme cold comes from several factors specific to our climate. When outdoor temperatures plunge to -25 or -30 degrees Celsius with wind chill, your furnace works continuously at maximum capacity to maintain indoor temperature, running up your heating costs significantly. A fireplace in your main living area — the room where you and your family actually spend time during a cold snap — can take the edge off furnace demand while creating a zone of comfortable warmth where you naturally congregate. This is more efficient than heating your entire home to the same temperature uniformly. If you spend six hours on a January evening in your living room with a fireplace running at half capacity, your furnace does not have to work as hard to maintain baseline temperature throughout the rest of the house.

The math works best with a **direct-vent gas fireplace**, which draws combustion air from outside and exhausts through a sealed vent pipe. A mid-range direct-vent unit produces roughly 30,000 to 40,000 BTU of heat at full capacity, though you will typically run it at 50 to 75 percent output for comfort and ambiance rather than full blast. At $0.15 to $0.20 per cubic metre for natural gas in Ottawa (winter rates), running a 35,000 BTU fireplace at half capacity for six hours per day costs roughly $1.20 to $1.50 per day, or about $36 to $45 per month. Compare that to forcing your furnace to work harder during the same period — you will often find the fireplace is the less expensive option, especially if your furnace is aging or oversized for your home. Modern gas fireplaces operate at 70 to 85 percent efficiency, meaning most of the fuel you burn becomes heat rather than escaping up the chimney.

Here are the practical conditions where a fireplace truly earns its place as backup heat: First, you need a fireplace that is actually in your home and properly installed. If you are considering installing one specifically for backup heating, weigh the upfront cost ($3,500 to $7,500 for a new direct-vent unit installed) against your annual heating bill savings — at typical Ottawa savings of $500 to $800 per year during extreme cold-snap periods, the payback is roughly 5 to 10 years, which makes sense if you plan to stay in your home that long. Second, you need to actively use it — sitting in front of a fireplace you have already paid to install costs only fuel, not installation or maintenance, so the marginal cost is minimal. Third, your furnace should be working hard enough that supplemental heat actually provides relief; if your home is adequately insulated and your furnace is sized correctly, you may not gain much benefit from running a fireplace occasionally during normal cold snaps, but during the extreme -25 to -35 degree

days that Ottawa experiences 10 to 15 times per winter, the relief is real.

Important considerations: A gas fireplace should never be your primary heat source during an Ottawa winter — your furnace exists for a reason, and relying on a fireplace as your main heating creates serious risks if the fireplace malfunctions or you are away from home. Also, ensure your gas fireplace is properly installed with correct venting and clearances, and that it has been inspected by a TSSA-licensed professional; an improperly vented gas fireplace can produce carbon monoxide, which is absolutely dangerous when you are running it for extended hours during a cold snap. Finally, make sure your chimney and venting system are designed for the specific fireplace you install — retrofitting a gas insert into an old masonry chimney requires a proper liner and inspection to ensure safe venting.

If you already have a fireplace installed, this is a straightforward equation: run it during deep cold snaps for comfort and cost savings. If you are considering installing one primarily for backup heat, the payback timeline and your long-term plans for the home matter more than the seasonal benefit alone.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

- Luxe Painting and Renovations
- The Egress Group Inc
- Vanguard Environmental
- The Fixer
- SDR Electric, Plumbing & Heating Inc.

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Q17

What does it cost to repair freeze-thaw damage on a fireplace chimney crown in Ottawa each spring?

Repairing freeze-thaw damage to a chimney crown in Ottawa typically costs **$300 to $1,200**, depending on the extent of the damage, the chimney's height and accessibility, and whether the repair involves patching cracks or complete crown replacement.

Why the Ottawa Climate Makes Crown Repair Inevitable

Ottawa's extreme freeze-thaw cycle is the single greatest threat to chimney crowns. The chimney crown — the concrete or mortar cap that sits atop your chimney — takes direct punishment from winter weather. Water from snow melt, rain, and frost penetration seeps into microscopic cracks and pores in the concrete or mortar. When the temperature drops below zero, that water expands approximately 9 percent as it freezes, widening cracks and spalling (breaking apart) the crown from the inside out. By spring, homeowners often find visible cracks, missing chunks of concrete, and areas where the crown has begun to separate from the chimney itself. In Ottawa, where temperatures regularly drop below -25 degrees Celsius and frost cycles occur 50 or more times each winter, crown damage accumulates year after year.

A small crack that costs $300 to $500 to seal in spring can become a major crown failure requiring $800 to $1,200 in repairs if left untreated. Worse, a deteriorating crown allows water to flow directly into the chimney flue and brick, accelerating damage to the entire structure and potentially causing water leaks inside your home.

What Spring Crown Repairs Actually Involve

A typical spring inspection by a chimney professional (ideally WETT-certified) will identify cracks, spalling, mortar erosion, and separation between the crown and the chimney walls. Small cracks — hairline fractures less than 1/8 inch wide — can sometimes be sealed with a flexible concrete crack filler or chimney crown sealant for $300 to $400. These are interim measures that buy you time but are not permanent solutions.

Moderate damage — several cracks, visible spalling on the top or edges, or mortar missing from around the crown perimeter — typically requires tuckpointing (targeted mortar joint repair) and crown patching. This involves removing deteriorated mortar and concrete, cleaning out debris, and applying new high-quality chimney mortar and concrete sealant. Costs typically run $500 to $900 depending on how much of the crown surface requires work.

Extensive crown failure — large spalled areas, structural separation, deep cracks that have opened up the flue, or damage affecting more than 25 percent of the crown surface — often requires complete crown replacement. A new crown typically costs $800 to $1,200 installed, as it involves removing the old crown, cleaning the chimney top, building a proper sloped form, and pouring new concrete with a high-quality cement mix designed to withstand Ottawa's climate. A properly built crown should slope away from the center to shed water and extend at least 2 inches beyond the chimney walls on all sides.

Schedule Early — Spring Appointments Book Quickly

Most Ottawa homeowners discover crown damage in late March or April when they see water dripping in their fireplace or notice concrete chunks on the roof. By late April, reputable chimney contractors are booked solid through May. Schedule your inspection in March or even February if possible — not only will you get faster service, but you can address damage before the heating season ends and the problem potentially worsens over the

following winter. A Level 1 WETT inspection (visual inspection from ground level with binoculars or safe roof access) costs $250 to $450 and will identify crown damage clearly.

Prevention is Cheaper Than Repair

The best long-term investment in crown protection is preventive waterproofing. A professional-grade chimney crown sealant applied to a sound crown costs $250 to $600 and can extend the crown's lifespan by 5 to 10 years by reducing water penetration and freeze-thaw cycling damage. This is money well spent if your crown is currently in good condition. Similarly, ensuring your chimney cap (the metal mesh hood that sits on top of the crown) is properly installed and undamaged prevents much of the water entry that starts the damage cycle.

If your chimney is historically significant or located in a heritage district like the Glebe or Rockcliffe Park, confirm crown repair or replacement methods with the City of Ottawa's heritage planning office — some heritage designations have restrictions on chimney modifications.

When you're ready to get a spring crown inspection or repair, homeowners can browse experienced chimney technicians through the Ottawa Construction Network directory at justynrookcontracting.com/directory. Getting multiple quotes in March ensures you understand the exact scope of work and cost before making decisions.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

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Q18

When should I schedule my annual fireplace inspection in Ottawa to beat the fall rush before heating season?

Schedule your chimney inspection and cleaning in late April through May or early September through mid-October — these two windows let you avoid the fall rush, get faster appointment scheduling, and complete any necessary repairs before the heating season begins in earnest.

The reason timing matters so much in Ottawa is that virtually every homeowner waits until the first cold snap in October or early November to think about their fireplace. By then, reputable chimney sweeps and WETT inspectors are booked solid for weeks, sometimes months. If you discover a serious problem — a cracked chimney crown, deteriorating mortar joints, a Stage 3 creosote buildup, or spalling brick — you may not be able to get it repaired before winter arrives. This creates a dangerous situation where you either postpone using your fireplace entirely (defeating the purpose of having one in Ottawa's brutal winters) or operate an unsafe appliance through the coldest months of the year.

Spring scheduling (late April through May) has particular advantages. The ground has thawed, rooftop access is safer, and any repairs that are discovered can be completed before summer humidity and heat make external masonry work uncomfortable. Autumn scheduling (early September through mid-October) works well if spring slipped away from you — it still gives you a solid window before the November rush and allows time for repairs or relining work before the first serious freeze. Both seasons offer consistent temperatures above 5 degrees Celsius, which is critical for mortar and sealant curing on any chimney repairs.

A WETT Level 1 inspection (visual assessment) costs $250 to $450 in Ottawa and typically takes 1 to 2 hours. The inspector examines the chimney cap and crown, flashing, brick and mortar condition, interior flue, damper, and the fireplace or stove itself. They check for creosote buildup, cracks, water damage, and proper clearances to combustibles. For wood-burning fireplaces and stoves, WETT certification is the insurance industry standard — most homeowner insurance policies in Ottawa now require a valid WETT inspection before they will cover a wood-burning appliance. For gas fireplaces, your gas utility company recommends annual service by a TSSA-licensed technician, typically costing $150 to $250.

The stakes of waiting until fall are significant in Ottawa's climate. A small hairline crack in your chimney crown — easily repaired in May for $300 to $600 — will expand dramatically through summer and fall as the freeze-thaw cycle intensifies. By November, that same crack may require a full crown replacement ($800 to $1,200) or even extensive chimney rebuilding ($3,000 to $8,000 or more). Water that enters through a deteriorating cap and crown freezes inside the masonry, expanding at 9 percent per volume and breaking apart mortar and brick from the inside. This spalling process accelerates exponentially once winter temperatures set in, and it is the number one reason masonry chimneys fail prematurely in Ottawa.

Creosote accumulation also justifies early-season scheduling. If you burned a significant amount of wood the previous winter — a typical Ottawa household with a wood stove as supplemental heat burns 4 to 8 cords per season — creosote buildup can be substantial by spring. Waiting until October to have it cleaned means operating

through shoulder season months (September and early October) with a creosote-lined flue, which increases chimney fire risk and reduces heat transfer. A spring or early-fall inspection catches buildup before you use the fireplace heavily again, and if you are a heavy user, your sweep can recommend twice-yearly cleanings.

One practical tip: if you are using your fireplace or wood stove through shoulder seasons (May through September in Ottawa), get your sweep out in April rather than waiting until fall. Light use during spring heating needs means creosote accumulation, and you want that cleaned before you resume regular heating in autumn. Conversely, if your fireplace is purely decorative and you do not plan to use it until November, a September inspection still gives you peace of mind and avoids the rush.

When you contact a chimney sweep or WETT inspector to schedule your spring or early-fall inspection, ask if they have identified any issues that require prompt attention — this gives you a realistic timeline for getting repairs done before the season begins. If the inspection reveals that you need chimney relining, crown repair, or significant tuckpointing work, early scheduling ensures the contractor can fit you in before the weather window closes or the fall rush arrives. You can browse experienced WETT-certified chimney sweeps and fireplace professionals through the Ottawa Construction Network directory to compare availability and read profiles — scheduling several weeks ahead in spring or early fall virtually guarantees you will get an appointment at a time that works for your schedule rather than scrambling in October.

Looking for experienced contractors? The Ottawa Construction Network connects Ottawa homeowners with qualified professionals:

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- SDR Electric, Plumbing & Heating Inc.
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Q19

Can Ottawa's extreme temperature swings from minus 30 to plus 35 crack my exterior fireplace chimney masonry over time?

Yes, Ottawa's extreme temperature swings — regularly reaching -30 degrees Celsius in winter and +35 degrees Celsius in summer — will absolutely crack and eventually destroy an exterior fireplace chimney if it is not properly maintained and waterproofed. The temperature range of 60 degrees or more that occurs between seasons is the single most destructive force acting on masonry chimneys in the National Capital Region, and it operates through a process called spalling that can reduce a sound chimney to a crumbling hazard within a decade.

Why Ottawa's Freeze-Thaw Cycle Is So Damaging

The freeze-thaw process works like this: water from rain, snow, and condensation enters the microscopic pores and cracks in brick, mortar joints, and the concrete chimney crown. When the temperature drops below zero — which happens 50 or more times per winter in Ottawa — that water freezes and expands approximately 9 percent in volume. This expansion creates internal pressure that widens existing cracks and breaks apart mortar and brick from the inside out. When temperatures rise again, the ice melts and water continues to seep deeper into the masonry. Over multiple freeze-thaw cycles throughout winter and spring, this process systematically weakens the entire chimney structure.

The problem is accelerated because chimneys are particularly vulnerable to water infiltration. The chimney crown — the concrete or mortar cap at the very top where the flue terminates — takes the most direct impact from precipitation, ice accumulation, and freeze-thaw cycling. A cracked or poorly maintained crown is like leaving a door open for water to enter the entire chimney system. The flashing where the chimney meets the roofline is another major entry point. Once water is inside the masonry, Ottawa's temperature swings ensure it will freeze and expand multiple times, each cycle causing incremental damage.

Real-World Timeline in Ottawa's Climate

A properly constructed chimney with quality mortar, a sound crown, and good waterproofing can last 50+ years in Ottawa. However, a chimney with minor cracks in the crown, deteriorated mortar joints, or no waterproofing protection will typically show visible spalling (chunks of brick or mortar breaking away) within 5 to 10 years and become structurally unsound within 15 to 20 years. Once spalling begins, deterioration accelerates because the exposed masonry is now more porous and absorbs even more water.

Protection Strategies

The good news is that proper maintenance and waterproofing can protect your chimney for decades despite Ottawa's harsh climate. The essential protective measures are:

Chimney crown repair or replacement: If your crown is cracked, missing chunks, or has been poorly repointed with mortar (which cracks more easily than proper concrete crowns), it needs immediate attention. A properly constructed crown should have a slight slope to shed water and an overhang (drip edge) that directs water away from the masonry below. Repairing or replacing a deteriorated crown typically costs $300 to $1,200 depending on accessibility and chimney height.

Waterproofing the masonry: A quality waterproofing sealant applied to the exterior brick and mortar joints — not a paint, which traps moisture inside — creates a breathable barrier that sheds water while allowing trapped moisture to escape. This is one of the single most effective defences against Ottawa's freeze-thaw damage. Waterproofing costs $250 to $600 and should be reapplied every 5 to 7 years.

Tuckpointing deteriorated mortar joints: If mortar joints are crumbly, missing, or eroded, they should be carefully repointed with mortar that matches the original (typically a softer lime mortar, not modern concrete mortar, which is too hard and can damage surrounding brick). This prevents water from entering through gaps between bricks. Tuckpointing costs $500 to $2,500 depending on the extent of deterioration.

Chimney cap installation or upgrade: A properly fitted cap prevents rain and snow from entering the flue directly and helps prevent ice dam formation around the crown. A quality cap costs $200 to $600 installed.

Annual inspection: Have your chimney inspected at least annually — ideally in spring after winter, when freeze-thaw damage is most visible. A WETT inspector can identify early signs of spalling, crown deterioration, or moisture problems before they become structural emergencies.

When Relining or Rebuilding Becomes Necessary

If the exterior masonry is severely spalled or the chimney is leaning, cracking at major joints, or deteriorating rapidly, waterproofing alone is not sufficient. You may need a chimney reline (if the clay tile flue is also damaged) or a full chimney rebuild. A stainless steel chimney reline costs $2,000 to $5,000. A complete chimney rebuild above the roofline runs $3,000 to $8,000, while a full rebuild from foundation to crown can exceed $20,000. These are expensive options, but they are necessary if structural integrity is compromised, and they are far less costly than ignoring the problem until the chimney collapses or water damage destroys your home's interior.

The key insight for Ottawa homeowners is this: your chimney is under constant assault from a 60-degree temperature swing that occurs every year. It is not a question of whether freeze-thaw damage will happen — it is only a question of whether you will maintain and protect your chimney proactively or wait until emergency repairs become necessary. Spring is the ideal time to schedule a chimney inspection and any needed waterproofing work,

before the next winter cycle begins. If your chimney is showing visible cracks, spalling, or deteriorated mortar, reach out to a qualified masonry contractor or WETT-certified chimney specialist. You can browse fireplace and chimney contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory to find professionals who understand Ottawa's specific climate challenges and can assess your chimney's condition accurately.

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Q20

How much would a battery backup for my gas fireplace cost so it works during Ottawa ice storm power outages?

A battery backup system for a gas fireplace costs $800 to $2,500 installed in Ottawa, depending on the battery capacity, inverter size, and installation complexity — but the honest answer is more nuanced than a simple price tag, because not all gas fireplaces can use battery backup, and the solution requires understanding what you're trying to power during an outage.

Why this matters in Ottawa's ice storm reality

Ottawa ice storms are brutally common — the region experiences major freezing rain events roughly every 4 to 5 years, and the 1998 ice storm that paralyzed the entire region for weeks remains a reference point for how catastrophic extended power loss can be in our climate. When the power goes out in January and temperatures plummet, homeowners immediately think about their heating sources, and if you have a gas fireplace, the natural assumption is that it should keep working. The problem is that many gas fireplaces — especially direct-vent models — rely on electrical components to operate: the ignition system (spark igniter or hot surface igniter), the blower fan, the thermostatic controls, and sometimes the gas valve solenoid all require electricity. Without power, these fireplaces sit dark and cold, even though natural gas is still flowing to the house.

What can actually run on battery backup

Modern gas fireplaces have varying electrical demands. A direct-vent unit with an electronic ignition and blower fan typically requires 120 volts AC and draws 10 to 15 amps when operating — that's roughly 1,200 to 1,800 watts continuously, plus a startup surge. The ignition system alone might draw 20 to 30 amps during the spark cycle. A battery backup system must provide clean, stable AC power in these amounts, which rules out cheap consumer-grade power banks and requires a proper uninterruptible power supply (UPS) system or solar battery setup.

The simplest solution is a whole-home battery system like a Tesla Powerwall ($15,000 to $25,000 installed in Ottawa, including electrical work) or a LG Chem battery ($10,000 to $18,000 installed) paired with a home energy management system. These systems can power your entire house, including the gas fireplace, for 8 to 12 hours depending on usage. If you only care about the fireplace, a dedicated battery backup system costs far less: a 3,000 to 5,000-watt battery inverter with 48-volt lithium or lead-acid battery bank runs $1,500 to $3,500 installed, and a portable solar generator (like a Goal Zero Yeti 6000 or similar) costs $3,000 to $4,000 but requires no installation.

The practical trade-offs

Here's where the ice storm reality intersects with cost: a battery backup system will run your gas fireplace blower and ignition system, but it will not heat your entire house or run your furnace, water heater, electric stove, or refrigerator simultaneously. An ice storm lasting 72 hours — like the 1998 event — means the battery drains relatively quickly once you start running other appliances. A dedicated 5,000-watt battery system can run a gas fireplace blower (roughly 500 to 800 watts) continuously for 8 to 10 hours, then you're relying on the fireplace's natural convection for some warmth and hoping the power comes back.

Many Ottawa homeowners find that a backup power generator (propane or natural gas) paired with their gas fireplace is more practical and cost-effective than battery backup. A 7,500 to 10,000-watt natural gas generator ($3,500 to $6,000 installed with a permanent concrete pad and automatic transfer switch) will run your furnace, some lights, and your gas fireplace blower indefinitely as long as natural gas is flowing — which it usually is even during extended power outages. Natural gas service is far more resilient to ice storms than electrical service because gas lines are underground and don't sag under ice weight like power lines do.

Important considerations

Not all gas fireplaces can be easily connected to battery backup. Some older models have purely mechanical thermostatic controls and do not require electricity to operate — if you own one of these rare units (mostly older B-vent models with standing pilot flames), it will work during an outage without any backup power. Inspect your fireplace manual or have a TSSA-licensed gas fitter verify whether your specific unit can run on battery backup before investing in a system. Battery lifespan is another factor — lithium batteries last 10 to 15 years and maintain capacity well, while lead-acid batteries degrade much faster (3 to 5 years) and lose significant capacity in Ottawa's

cold winters. A battery system sitting idle in a cold garage during the off-season may not have full charge when the ice storm actually hits, so you need a charging strategy baked into your plan.

Insurance coverage and permitting vary — battery backup systems and generators require electrical permits and inspection by ESA (Electrical Safety Authority) if hardwired into your home. Portable solar generators have zero permitting burden but also zero integration with your home's electrical panel, meaning you run extension cords and are manually managing which appliances draw power.

The honest recommendation for Ottawa

If you want your gas fireplace to work during an ice storm, your best options in priority order are: (1) install a natural gas backup generator on a permanent pad with automatic transfer switch ($3,500 to $6,000 installed) — this is the most reliable, cost-effective solution for Ottawa's climate and ice storm risks; (2) keep a portable solar generator ($3,000 to $4,000) charged and ready specifically to run your fireplace blower and essential circuits during an outage; or (3) invest in a home battery system ($10,000 to $25,000) if you want comprehensive backup power for your entire house beyond just the fireplace. A dedicated battery backup for the fireplace alone ($1,500 to $3,500) makes sense only if you've already ruled out a generator and want a lower-cost middle ground.

If you're seriously considering a backup power solution for your fireplace and want to explore what makes sense for your specific home, Ottawa Fireplaces can connect you with licensed gas fitters and TSSA-certified technicians in our network who can assess your current fireplace setup, discuss generator or battery options, and handle any electrical or gas work that the installation requires.

Q21

What spring maintenance does my gas fireplace need after running constantly through an Ottawa winter hitting minus 30?

Your gas fireplace has endured an incredibly demanding season in an Ottawa winter that cold, and spring maintenance is absolutely essential to keep it running safely and efficiently through next winter. The combination of constant use, extreme temperature swings, moisture infiltration from the freeze-thaw cycle, and the stress of rapid heating and cooling creates conditions that can compromise both the appliance and the venting system.

Start with a professional service call from a TSSA-licensed technician. This is the most important step, and it should happen in April or May before the heating season ends and contractors become harder to book. A professional gas fireplace service ($150 to $250) includes inspection of the burner assembly, cleaning and checking the ignition electrode, testing the thermopile or electronic ignition system, verifying proper gas pressure and combustion characteristics, inspecting the venting system both inside and outside, checking for any corrosion or damage to the heat exchanger, and ensuring the blower (if equipped) is functioning smoothly. After a winter of constant operation in Ottawa's climate extremes, small wear items like the ignition electrode may need replacement, and the venting system needs visual confirmation that no damage from ice buildup or wind has occurred.

The venting pipe is your second priority. Direct-vent gas fireplaces use sealed double-wall vent pipes that draw combustion air from outside and exhaust to the exterior. Ottawa's brutal winters mean the exterior termination cap is regularly exposed to -30 temperatures, heavy snow accumulation, ice buildup, and wind-driven precipitation. Walk around the exterior of your home in early spring and inspect the outside vent termination. Look for ice or frost buildup around the cap, any visible cracks or gaps where the pipe enters the wall, and confirm that the cap is not blocked by snow, ice, or debris. If you see ice encasing the cap or blockage inside the opening, do not attempt to chip it away yourself — contact a professional. Ice formation around a vent cap can restrict airflow, potentially causing incomplete combustion and carbon monoxide issues. A technician can safely thaw and inspect the termination during the spring service call.

Inside the home, examine the fireplace glass closely. An Ottawa winter of constant operation coats the glass with a thin film of combustion residue that reduces the flame view and makes the fireplace less enjoyable. Use only the manufacturer-recommended glass cleaner (check your owner's manual) or a commercial fireplace glass cleaner — never use household glass cleaners like Windex, which can leave residue that becomes permanently baked onto the glass at high temperatures. Some gas fireplaces have removable glass panels that can be taken out and cleaned more thoroughly, while others have fixed glass that must be cleaned in place. If your fireplace has a thermostat or wall switch, test it to confirm it responds correctly — batteries in wireless thermostats can weaken over a winter of heavy use.

Check the structural integrity of the chimney, especially if your gas fireplace uses a B-vent (single-wall) system rather than direct-vent. B-vent chimneys that run through an unheated attic or exterior wall are vulnerable to condensation during Ottawa's freeze-thaw cycling. In spring, have a contractor visually inspect any exposed vent pipe in attics, crawl spaces, or exterior walls for rust, corrosion, or separation of joints. Direct-vent systems are sealed and have far lower risk of this problem, but it is still worth a visual check.

The hearth and surround deserve attention too. If your fireplace has stone, tile, or grout around the opening, inspect it for any cracks that may have developed from thermal expansion and contraction over the heating season. Ottawa's temperature swings — jumping from -25 indoors to -25 outdoors every time a door opens — create enormous stress on materials. Small cracks in tile grout are cosmetic for now but can be sealed with grout repair to prevent water and dust infiltration later.

Finally, clear away any accumulated ash from the firebox if your model allows access (some sealed units do not). A small amount of ash is normal, but excessive buildup restricts proper air circulation and affects combustion efficiency. Your technician can do this during the service call if needed.

One critical note: if you have not had a WETT inspection of your chimney or venting system in over two years, consider scheduling a Level 1 inspection ($250 to $450) in spring alongside the gas fireplace service. Even though your appliance is gas-fired and does not produce creosote like a wood stove, the chimney and venting system still need periodic assessment — especially if the chimney is used by other appliances or if you have noticed any draft issues or water stains around the chimney.

If you need to find a TSSA-licensed gas technician or WETT-certified professional for your spring maintenance, you can browse fireplace and chimney contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory at justynrookcontracting.com/directory — they can often book spring appointments efficiently before the rush of fall maintenance calls begins in September.

Q22

Should I close my fireplace damper during Ottawa's humid summer months or leave it partially open for airflow?

Leaving your fireplace damper **closed during summer is the right move** — this protects your home's conditioned air from escaping up the chimney and keeps humid outside air from entering through the flue. A closed damper acts as a seal between your living space and the outdoors, which matters significantly in Ottawa's hot, humid summers when your air conditioning is working hard.

Why This Matters in Ottawa's Climate

Ottawa summers are notoriously sticky, with humidity levels regularly climbing above 70 percent and temperatures hitting +30 to +35 degrees Celsius. Every time cool air leaks out of your house through an open damper — even a partially open one — your AC system has to work harder to replace it. Over the course of a three-month summer, this inefficiency adds up on your hydro bill. More importantly, an open damper creates a direct pathway for humid outdoor air to enter your home, potentially drawn down the chimney by pressure differences and air conditioning operation. This moisture can condense on chimney interior surfaces and the damper itself, creating ideal conditions for mold growth inside the flue.

The other consideration is pests and wildlife. An open damper during summer is an invitation for birds, squirrels, insects, and bats to explore your chimney system. Ottawa's wildlife quickly figures out that a dark, cool chimney is attractive real estate during hot months — and discovering a bird's nest or bat droppings when you fire up your fireplace in fall is neither pleasant nor hygienic.

How to Properly Close Your Damper

If you have a traditional masonry fireplace, close the damper fully by turning the handle or lever until you feel resistance — do not force it, as dampers can jam or break. Check that it seats tightly by holding a lit candle or incense stick near the damper opening; the smoke should not be pulled upward if the seal is good. Many older damper mechanisms wear out over decades and no longer seal completely, which means you may have air leakage even with the damper "closed." If you notice cold air or moisture issues during summer, your damper may need replacement.

For gas fireplaces with a sealed combustion chamber (direct-vent units), damper position is not relevant — the appliance draws air from outside through a dedicated intake pipe, so the chimney damper does not affect operation. The flue should be fully closed when the fireplace is not in use.

For wood stoves, there is no damper in the traditional sense — these appliances have a draft control or air inlet that regulates oxygen to the fire. Keep this fully closed during summer when the stove is not in use to prevent reverse draft and chimney odours.

Additional Summer Fireplace Maintenance

While your fireplace is closed up for summer, this is actually an excellent time for a WETT Level 1 inspection (around $250 to $450 in Ottawa) to check for any damage that occurred during the heating season — spalling brick, deteriorated mortar joints, or creosote buildup. Summer is also when you should have your chimney professionally cleaned before fall arrives, rather than waiting until October when every sweep in Ottawa is booked solid. Scheduling your chimney sweep and inspection in June or July means you will be ready for the first crisp September nights when people suddenly want their fireplaces again.

If you are uncertain whether your damper is sealing properly or suspect moisture issues in your chimney, a WETT-certified chimney professional can assess the situation and recommend repairs — you can browse fireplace contractors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory if you need to connect with a local chimney sweep or inspector.

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- Denys Builds Designs Renovations
- Leeds Property Maintenance

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Q23

How much does it cost to winterize a wood-burning fireplace before Ottawa's freezing season starts in November?

Winterizing a wood-burning fireplace in Ottawa ahead of the cold season primarily involves a professional chimney inspection and cleaning, which typically costs **$175 to $350 for cleaning alone**, plus **$250 to $450 for a Level 1 WETT inspection** — bringing the total to roughly **$425 to $800** for a complete pre-season assessment and cleaning. If your chimney needs repairs uncovered during that inspection, costs will increase significantly.

Here's why this matters in Ottawa specifically. Your fireplace and chimney are about to endure five months of extreme stress — temperatures will swing from -30 degrees Celsius in January to above freezing on warmer January thaws, creating a relentless freeze-thaw cycle that expands and contracts every brick, mortar joint, and masonry component. Meanwhile, you'll be burning wood at higher volumes during these months, generating significant creosote buildup. That creosote hardens into a flammable coating inside your flue, and if it reaches Stage 3 (glazed creosote), you're at serious risk of a chimney fire. A thorough cleaning in October or early November removes this fire hazard before you fire up the stove regularly for months.

Your winterization checklist should include: A Level 1 WETT inspection by a certified chimney sweep ($250 to $450), which visually examines the chimney exterior, roof flashing, chimney crown, damper operation, and interior flue condition. Professional chimney cleaning during the same visit ($175 to $350) removes creosote, debris, and bird nests. A visual check of the chimney cap and crown for cracks or deterioration — if you spot damage, factor in **$200 to $600 for cap replacement** or **$300 to $1,200 for crown repair**. Inspection of the fireplace damper to confirm it closes completely (traps heat when not in use) and opens freely (prevents smoke backup). A check of your firebox for loose bricks or deteriorated mortar — minor tuckpointing might be needed before heavy use. Testing that any carbon monoxide detectors near your fireplace are functioning (you should have one on every level of your home and near sleeping areas; if you don't, budget $50 to $150 per detector).

If your inspection uncovers problems, costs escalate. A cracked chimney crown allows water infiltration during winter freeze-thaw cycles, potentially creating interior water damage and accelerating deterioration. Crown repair runs $300 to $1,200 depending on severity. If the flue liner is cracked or deteriorated, you're looking at chimney relining with stainless steel (**$2,000 to $5,000**) or a cast-in-place liner (**$4,000 to $8,000**) — this is essential work that cannot wait, as water and ice will worsen cracks throughout the winter. Damaged flashing where the chimney meets the roof (**$300 to $800 to repair**) must be sealed before winter or you'll have leaks inside the house.

A critical consideration: Many Ottawa homeowners delay chimney inspections until October, only to find they cannot get a qualified WETT-certified sweep until November or December — exactly when everyone in the city suddenly remembers their chimney. The inspection and cleaning backlogs during the first cold snap can stretch booking times to 3 to 4 weeks. Schedule your inspection in September or early October to avoid this rush. You'll also secure better pricing and have time to address any repairs the inspector uncovers before you rely on the fireplace for supplemental heat.

One more detail: Stock your seasoned hardwood now if you burn 4 or more cords per season (typical for Ottawa households using a fireplace as supplemental heat). A cord of seasoned hardwood costs **$350 to $450 delivered** in Ottawa, and you want wood that has dried for 12 to 18 months to reach the 15 to 20 percent moisture content needed for clean, efficient burning. Unseasoned wood produces massive amounts of creosote and barely generates heat — it's a false economy that will accelerate the need for expensive chimney relining.

If you haven't had your chimney inspected in more than a year, or if you're buying a home with a wood-burning fireplace, getting a professional Level 1 WETT inspection is non-negotiable before the heating season starts. Many homeowners' insurance policies now require a WETT inspection certificate before coverage applies to a wood-burning appliance, so the inspection also protects your insurance coverage. You can browse experienced chimney sweeps and WETT-certified inspectors through the Ottawa Construction Network directory when you're ready to schedule.

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