



Thatched Roofs –
Separation in Construction



FIRE PROTECTION SYSTEMS

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THATCH OVERVIEW

Statistically, homes with thatched roofs are no more likely to catch fire than those with conventional roofs if the owner is made aware and understands the risk of thatch fire. However, if a thatched roof does ignite, and is allowed to develop it's almost impossible to control and the results can be devastating.

TAS OVERVIEW

For over 40 years we have developed close working relationships with many of the leading insurance companies, test houses and product manufacturers and as part of the continuous feedback that we receive, we have continued to develop our range of fire barrier systems that can be fitted to both new and existing thatched roofs. These act to create a separation between the thatch and the roof timbers in the event of a fire.

Even though every thatch fire will vary due to many things such as weather conditions, location of property, thickness of the thatch etc., the key objective of any fire barrier system is to buy more time.

By joining forces and sharing skills, knowledge and information, we can all play a part in reducing the risk to the occupants and the many listed buildings that in most cases are almost destroyed as a result of a thatch fire. This will also help to maintain the thatching industry and continue to promote the desirability of owning a thatched house whilst at the same time helping to protect our heritage for future generations.

COMMON CAUSES

Thatch roof fires can be attributed to many different causes ranging from old or faulty electrical systems through to the likes of bonfires or fireworks. However, it is widely accepted that there are two main causes of thatch fires which are both in relation to chimneys and the use of wood burning or multi-fuel stoves, these causes are:

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Heat Transfer – Wood burners and multi-fuel stoves can generate very high gas temperatures; this in turn can be transferred through the brickwork of the chimney to the thatch, this is known as Heat Transfer. Heat Transfer is further increased at the point that the thatch meets the chimney; this is due to the insulating properties of the thatching material.

The Heat Transfer process can cause thatch to smoulder and ignite if temperatures in excess of 200°C are reached. Studies show that wood burners and multi-fuel stoves being installed into thatched properties are a major cause of thatch fires.

This is mainly due to faulty chimneys, poorly or incorrectly fitted liners, combined with high flue gas temperatures being generated by these efficient stoves.

Worse still, the thatch is at a much greater risk of the effects of Heat Transfer if the chimney is not lined, additionally the transfer process can be accelerated if the condition of the brick work or mortar has degraded over the years.

Ejected Embers or Sparks – Embers or sparks exiting the chimney have been accredited to the cause of many thatch fires and when investigations have been completed following a thatch fire it has been identified that fires were reported within 30 minutes of a fire being lit or being re-fuelled.

Several issues can increase the risk of the effects from ejected embers or sparks, these include:

- Spark Arrestors – If not cleaned at least once a year they can clog up and will catch fire in their own right, which in turn could cause a thatch fire.
- Chimney Height – The risk of a thatch fire is further increased when the chimney height has been reduced following many years of re-coating works, this is more common with thatching materials such as long straw.

Other chimney related Issues –

Many chimneys are not lined correctly, for example, if a flexi liner is installed incorrectly and is therefore allowed to touch the side of the chimney it can cause a hot spot, which in turn will dramatically accelerate the process of heat transfer.

Bricks missing, it is impossible to fully check the condition of the chimney at the point that it passes through the thatch, unless the thatch is removed or possibly an internal CCTV type survey is completed.

Education – It is still a fact that many thatch fires could have been prevented if more information had been given to the property owner with a view to enabling them to have a better appreciation of good practice, such as how to use and maintain appliances and select the correct fuels.

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SOLUTIONS

With changes in building regulations and various guidance notes, there is a great deal of confusion relating to suitable chimney systems, fire barriers and retardants that can be used for thatched properties.

Chimneys – Chimneys are a big area for concern and needs to be the main area for the property owner to consider if they are planning to use a wood burning or multi-fuel stove or even an open fire. In the UK, if a new appliance is installed, then the complete installation to include the liner and the height of the chimney has to comply with current building regulations as detailed in Approval Document J.

A suitable liner is a must for any operational chimney in a thatched property, especially when a wood burning or multi-fuel stove is being used. We would also recommend that property owners that aren't planning to install new appliances still seek advice from the likes of Solid Fuel Association or HETAS if they have any concerns.

Many of the specialist insurance companies either require a CCTV chimney survey or they offer this as an option. Given some of the issues already mentioned above, we would always recommend that this is a good precaution for any home owner.

Other causes – In addition to chimneys and liners other areas for consideration should include checking electrical systems, smoke alarms, fire extinguishers etc. Our website contains advice to help the property owner address and consider what precautions they can take to reduce the risk of a fire in the first place. In addition to the information available on our website, most UK Fire & Rescue Services publish a 'Thatch Information Pack' which gives useful details and advice as to how the owner can reduce the risk of a fire.

Fire Barriers – Reasons to Install:

Physical Fire Barriers for thatched roofs are designed to create a separation between the thatch and the rest of the building. The principle is that in the event of a fire the thatch is seen as sacrificial.

Although some barriers are sold individually, we suggest a mix of either the TAS100 Thatch Fireboard or the Thatch Firewall Membrane for integrity and the non-combustible Thatchbatt® for insulation.

Fire Retardant Sprays – TAS Thatchsayf Fire Retardant Spray can be applied as a standalone product or in addition to having a physical fire barrier system installed.



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On exposure to sparks from chimneys, bonfires or barbeques, Thatchsayf will intumesce and form a carbonised char, which binds the thatch stems together, cutting off the supply of oxygen to the fire, delaying the spread of flame and lowering the radiated heat output.

SUMMARY

Prevention is the best solution!

But on the basis that if a fire happens, a fire barrier system will help to reduce the amount of damage and will create a safer working environment for Fire & Rescue Services.

Thatching Advisory Services have spoken at a number of events and conferences over the years and we strongly believe that better education and awareness is required, to increase awareness and help to reduce the risks associated with thatch and fire. 🌿

For additional advice and product details please visit www.thatchingadvisoryservices.co.uk or contact an advisor on 08455 20 40 60.

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