



Consulting, Resource, Education, Training, and Support Services for Home Inspectors  
"A candle loses no light when it lights another candle."

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## GAS IGNITERS FOR WOOD/SOLID FUEL- BURNING FIREPLACES©

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Up until the mid 1960s it was not uncommon for fireplaces to be equipped with gas igniters to eliminate the need for having to use kindling to start a fire. These igniters were typically nothing more than a lateral length of  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch steel pipe with multiple perforations uniformly spaced along the top and capped at the downstream end. The upstream end typically passed through one side of the firebox and was attached to a key-operated in-line shutoff valve located in the wall or floor adjacent to the fireplace.

To start a fire, firewood was placed in the firebox and on top of the igniter pipe, a match or other igniting device would be held next to the most upstream perforation in the pipe, and the gas valve would be opened by turning the key. Once the firewood was burning well, the gas valve to the igniter would be closed.

While all of this was pretty simple and straight forward, it was not particularly safe. A homeowner could forget to turn off the valve once the fire was burning well. There was no safety pilot. If the key were left in the valve or where a child could reach it, the gas could be turned on without being lit. The igniter could be lit while the damper was closed creating conditions for the production of CO (carbon monoxide) and introducing it into the interior house air. The igniter pipe was vulnerable to damage from the use of fireplace tools - pokers, tongs, shovels, etc.

It was for these reasons that building codes eventually prohibited the installation of these igniters.

So, what should home inspectors do when they encounter a fireplace equipped with a gas igniter of the type described above? Should it be considered an **ADVERSE CONDITION** and be described as such in the report? In fact, it is an installation that is "grandfathered" by the code. In other words, when present as a component which was installed when it was not prohibited by any building codes or regulations, there is typically no requirement that it be removed, disconnected, or modified as long as no other new work or other modifications are being made to the fireplace.

The following is prototype report wording offered for consideration when this type of fireplace gas igniter is present.

*The fireplace in the (insert the location of the fireplace here) is equipped with a gas igniter device consistent with installation at the time of original construction of the fireplace. While installation of gas fireplace igniters may have conformed to **GENERALLY ESTABLISHED PRACTICES** at the time of original construction of the home and removal of these devices is not required by most jurisdictional building authorities, installation of gas igniters is no longer considered good practice.*

*However, because of the lack of safety pilots or other protective safety features and devices for gas igniters, removal of the igniter may be considered as an elective modification.*

*Removal of the gas igniter will typically require repair of any opening in the firebox through which the igniter piping passes and proper termination of the gas supply piping which feeds the igniter. All elective modification work should be performed only by **QUALIFIED** individuals or companies and in accordance with all applicable standards and governmental requirements pertaining to permits, codes, ordinances, and regulations.*

*Any information in this inspection report pertaining to elective modifications is provided solely as a courtesy to Customers for their consideration as part of any overall upgrading and maintenance program they may choose to implement for the subject property.*