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March 29, 2011

Joseph Hill, R.A.
State of New York Dept. of State
Division of Code Enforcement and Administration
41 State Street, Suite 1130
Albany, NY 12231-0001

Re: Rumford Fireplace Doors

Dear Mr. Hill,

Rumford fireplaces are radiant heaters. Glass doors block that radiant heat. Just as the glass in a greenhouse is transparent to the visible short wave length sunlight but is opaque to the long infrared heat rays so the greenhouse admits sunlight and traps heat, you can see through glass fireplace doors but they block almost all of the radiant heat.

While it makes no sense to burn a fire in a radiant heating fireplace with the fireplace doors closed, some believe the fireplace doors should be closed on a dying fire to prevent loss of heated room air.

What really happens, however, is that the doors block whatever heat is still being radiated from the hot firebox but doesn't block much of the heated room air. All fireplace doors available are anything but air tight. In fact they leak about as much as an open damper - on purpose - for cooling purposes - so the radiant heat trapped in the firebox, built to a code that never anticipated fireplace doors, doesn't over heat the firebox and cause a fire hazard.

The intent of the Energy Conservation Construction Code of New York State seems to be to conserve energy. It would be more effective, as applied to a radiant heating Rumford fireplace, to require tight-fitting dampers that can be closed and sealed after the fire has died down or is not in use. Rumford fireplaces offered by Superior Clay and the Buckley Rumford Co. feature gasketed dampers.

Best,

Jim Buckley