

CALGARY FIREPLACES

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# Fireplace Conversion

Wood-to-gas, gas-to-electric, and efficiency upgrade conversions for Calgary fireplaces

25 Expert Answers from Fireplace IQ

[calgaryfireplaces.com/construction-brain](https://calgaryfireplaces.com/construction-brain)

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## How do I convert an unused Calgary fireplace opening into a decorative feature without removing the chimney?

**Converting an unused fireplace opening into a decorative feature is an excellent way to maintain the focal point appeal while eliminating maintenance concerns about an aging chimney system.** You have several attractive options that work particularly well in Calgary homes, from simple seasonal displays to permanent built-in features.

The most straightforward approach is **creating a decorative display area** within the existing firebox. Clean out any debris, soot, or old damper components, then install a simple wooden platform or decorative base about 6-8 inches off the firebox floor. This creates a perfect stage for seasonal arrangements — pillar candles in hurricane glasses during winter, potted plants or flowers in spring and summer, or decorative pumpkins and gourds in fall. Many Calgary homeowners use battery-operated LED candles for the ambiance of flickering light without any fire safety concerns.

For a more permanent solution, consider **installing built-in shelving or a decorative insert**. A custom wooden shelf system can display books, artwork, or collectibles, essentially turning your fireplace into an architectural bookcase. Stone or tile work can create a beautiful planter area for indoor plants — particularly effective with trailing plants like pothos or ivy that soften the hard edges of the firebox. Some homeowners install a decorative metal screen or artistic ironwork as a permanent backdrop, then change seasonal displays in front of it.

**Electric fireplace inserts** offer the most dramatic transformation while maintaining the fireplace aesthetic. Modern electric units with realistic LED flame effects can slide right into your existing opening, requiring only a standard electrical outlet. Units range from \$800-\$2,500 and provide both ambiance and supplemental heat during Calgary's long winters. Unlike gas conversions, electric inserts don't require permits, gas lines, or chimney modifications — you're simply using the opening as a decorative housing.

**Important safety considerations** apply even for decorative use. Have the chimney damper inspected and ensure it can be fully closed and sealed to prevent downdrafts, animal entry, and heat loss. A closed damper also prevents moisture from entering during Calgary's freeze-thaw cycles, which can cause interior water damage. If you're using real candles, never leave them unattended and ensure adequate clearance from any combustible decorations. Consider installing a carbon monoxide detector nearby if you're using any flame-based lighting, even candles.

**Chimney maintenance** becomes simpler but doesn't disappear entirely. With the fireplace permanently closed off, you won't need annual cleaning or inspection, but the exterior chimney crown and cap should still be monitored for weather damage. Calgary's chinook winds and freeze-thaw cycles continue to affect masonry chimneys regardless of use. A chimney cap prevents animal entry and water infiltration, which is particularly important for unused

chimneys that lack the drying effect of regular fires.

The **cost for decorative conversion** ranges from \$200-\$800 for DIY seasonal displays and basic shelving, up to \$2,000-\$4,000 for custom built-ins or electric insert installations. This is significantly less expensive than full fireplace restoration or gas conversion, which can run \$3,000-\$8,000 in the Calgary market.

This approach works especially well in Calgary homes where the existing masonry fireplace was inefficient for heating but the homeowner wants to preserve the room's architectural character. You maintain the visual focal point while eliminating concerns about chimney condition, annual maintenance, and heating efficiency.

**Need help with electrical work for an electric insert or custom carpentry for built-in shelving?** Find contractors through the Calgary Construction Network at [calgaryconstructionnetwork.com](http://calgaryconstructionnetwork.com) for electrical, carpentry, and general renovation services.

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Q2

## Can I convert a raised hearth gas fireplace to a flush floor-level unit in Calgary?

**Converting a raised hearth gas fireplace to floor level is technically possible but involves significant structural work, new gas permits, and often costs more than installing a completely new fireplace elsewhere in the room.**

The complexity depends on your current fireplace construction. If you have a factory-built gas fireplace sitting on a raised platform, the conversion requires removing the existing unit, demolishing the raised hearth structure, potentially relocating gas lines, and installing a new floor-level unit with proper clearances. If your fireplace is built into a masonry structure, the work becomes even more extensive, requiring partial demolition of stonework or brick and potential structural modifications to support the new configuration.

**Gas line modifications will require a new gas permit** from the City of Calgary and inspection by a Safety Codes Officer. The gas fitter may need to relocate the gas connection point, resize the line, or install new shut-off valves depending on the new fireplace location and specifications. Venting changes are also likely — your current direct-vent termination may not work with a floor-level unit, especially if the vent path changes significantly.

**Calgary's extreme cold makes this decision more critical** because you'll be without supplemental heat during the conversion work, which could take several days to complete. Plan this project for spring or summer, not during heating season. The structural work may also require a building permit if you're modifying load-bearing elements or making significant changes to the room layout.

**Cost considerations make this conversion expensive** — typically \$4,000-\$8,000 for demolition, new fireplace, gas work, and refinishing, compared to \$3,000-\$6,000 for a new installation in a different location. You're essentially paying for demolition work that adds no value while still buying a complete new fireplace system.

**Consider alternatives before committing to this conversion.** A modern linear gas fireplace installed at floor level elsewhere in the room often creates a more dramatic focal point while preserving your existing fireplace for dual-zone heating. Electric fireplace media walls are another option that requires no gas work and can be installed at floor level with just electrical connections.

**When to hire professionals:** All gas line work requires a licensed gas fitter, structural demolition needs an experienced contractor familiar with fireplace construction, and the new installation requires the same permits and inspections as any new fireplace. Never attempt gas line modifications yourself.

Need help finding a fireplace contractor experienced with conversions? Calgary Fireplaces can match you with professionals who handle complex renovation projects through the Calgary Construction Network.

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Q3

## What is the cost to convert a Calgary fireplace alcove into an entertainment centre with electric fireplace?

**Converting a Calgary fireplace alcove into an entertainment center with an electric fireplace typically costs \$3,000-\$8,000**, depending on the scope of electrical work, built-in cabinetry, and finishing materials. This is one of the most popular fireplace renovations in Calgary condos and modern homes where gas venting isn't practical.

The **electrical work forms the foundation of your project cost**. If your alcove has existing electrical outlets, a simple plug-in wall-mount electric fireplace can be installed for \$800-\$2,500 including the unit. However, most entertainment centers benefit from a dedicated 20-amp circuit to handle the fireplace plus TV and media equipment simultaneously without tripping breakers. Running a new circuit requires an electrical permit from the City of Calgary (\$100-\$150) and certified electrician installation (\$500-\$1,200 depending on distance from your electrical panel). Hardwired built-in electric fireplaces create the cleanest look but require additional electrical rough-in work.

**Custom millwork and cabinetry represent the largest cost variable.** Basic floating shelves and a simple mantel shelf run \$500-\$1,500 in materials if you're handy with woodworking. Mid-range built-in entertainment centers with closed storage, wire management, and integrated fireplace housing cost \$2,500-\$5,000 installed. High-end custom millwork with floor-to-ceiling built-ins, crown molding, and premium finishes reaches \$4,000-\$8,000. Many Calgary homeowners choose a hybrid approach — hiring a carpenter for the structural framework and doing the painting

and finishing themselves.

**Electric fireplace selection affects both cost and installation complexity.** Wall-mount units (\$400-\$1,500) offer the simplest installation but may look like an afterthought in a custom entertainment center. Built-in electric fireplaces (\$800-\$3,000) integrate seamlessly into millwork and provide a more finished appearance. Linear electric fireplaces (\$1,200-\$4,000) create a modern focal point and work especially well in contemporary Calgary homes. Consider heat output carefully — most electric fireplaces max out at 5,100 BTU (1,500 watts), which provides comfortable zone heating for the family room during Calgary's long winter season but won't heat your entire home.

**Calgary's electrical rates make operating costs a consideration.** At current Alberta electricity rates of roughly \$0.12-\$0.18 per kWh, running an electric fireplace costs \$0.18-\$0.27 per hour on high heat — significantly more expensive than a gas fireplace burning ATCO Gas at \$0.50-\$1.00 per hour for equivalent heat output. However, electric fireplaces offer unmatched convenience and safety, especially in condos where gas lines and venting create complications.

**Permit requirements are straightforward but important.** You'll need an electrical permit for any new circuit work, and the installation must be inspected by a Safety Codes Officer before energizing. The fireplace itself doesn't require additional permits since it's essentially a large electrical appliance. If your renovation involves structural modifications to the alcove opening, you may need a building permit from Calgary Planning & Development.

**Professional installation ensures safety and code compliance.** While homeowners can install plug-in electric fireplaces, the electrical circuit work must be done by a certified electrician. Custom millwork benefits from professional carpentry to ensure proper clearances, wire management, and structural integrity. Many Calgary contractors offer package deals combining electrical, carpentry, and finishing work.

Need help finding contractors for your entertainment center project? Calgary Fireplaces can match you with local fireplace installers, and the Calgary Construction Network connects you with electricians and carpenters at [calgaryconstructionnetwork.com](http://calgaryconstructionnetwork.com) for the complete renovation.

## How do I convert a non-functional decorative Calgary fireplace into a working gas unit?

**Converting a decorative fireplace into a working gas unit typically requires installing a gas insert or direct-vent gas fireplace, running a new gas line, and ensuring proper venting — but the feasibility depends entirely on your existing fireplace structure and chimney condition.**

The conversion process starts with determining what type of decorative fireplace you currently have. **Traditional masonry fireplaces** with brick or stone fireboxes and existing chimneys are excellent candidates for gas inserts, which slide into the existing firebox and use a flexible liner up the existing chimney. **Zero-clearance decorative units** (factory-built fireplaces common in homes built since the 1980s) may need complete replacement with a new direct-vent gas fireplace, as many decorative units aren't designed to handle the heat and combustion of a working gas appliance.

**Gas line installation** is the first major requirement and must be performed by a licensed gas fitter with a City of Calgary gas permit. ATCO Gas service is available throughout Calgary and surrounding communities, making this straightforward in most neighborhoods. The gas fitter will run a new line from your meter to the fireplace location — typically ½" or ¾" black iron pipe or CSST flexible gas line. Expect \$800-\$1,500 for gas line work depending on the distance from your meter and any obstacles like finished basements or multiple floor levels.

**Venting requirements** depend on your chosen approach. If you have an existing masonry chimney in good condition, a gas insert uses a flexible aluminum liner (6" diameter for most residential units) that runs from the insert up through the existing chimney and terminates with a new cap designed for gas appliances. If your existing chimney is damaged or you don't have one, a direct-vent gas fireplace can vent horizontally through an exterior wall using coaxial vent pipe — often the simpler and less expensive option for decorative fireplaces without proper chimneys.

**Critical inspection step:** Before any conversion work begins, have your existing fireplace and chimney thoroughly inspected. Many decorative fireplaces were never designed for actual combustion, and existing chimneys in Calgary homes often have damage from freeze-thaw cycles and chinook wind effects. Cracked chimney liners, deteriorated mortar joints, or structural issues must be addressed before installing any gas appliance. A chimney inspection costs \$200-\$400 but prevents dangerous installations.

**Alberta Building Code compliance** requires a gas permit for the installation, and the completed work must pass inspection by a certified Safety Codes Officer before the unit can be operated. The inspector verifies gas connections, venting clearances, combustion air supply, and overall installation safety. Never skip this step — unpermitted gas work is a serious safety hazard and insurance liability.

**Total project costs** typically range from \$3,500-\$7,000 for a complete conversion including a mid-range gas insert or direct-vent unit, gas line installation, venting work, and basic finishing. Premium units with custom stone surrounds can reach \$8,000-\$12,000. Gas inserts into existing masonry fireplaces are usually less expensive than complete direct-vent installations requiring new wall penetrations.

**Professional installation is mandatory** for all gas line work, venting modifications, and appliance connections. However, you can handle cosmetic finishing like painting the existing surround or installing a new mantel shelf (maintaining proper clearances from the firebox). The gas fitter and fireplace installer may be the same contractor or separate trades depending on their certifications.

Calgary Fireplaces can match you with qualified fireplace contractors who handle decorative-to-gas conversions throughout the Calgary area. Find local fireplace installers through the Calgary Construction Network directory at [calgaryconstructionnetwork.com/directory?trade=fireplaces](http://calgaryconstructionnetwork.com/directory?trade=fireplaces) for free estimates on your specific conversion project.

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Q5

## How much does it cost to convert a Calgary outdoor wood fire pit to natural gas?

**Converting an outdoor wood fire pit to natural gas in Calgary typically costs \$2,500-\$6,000**, depending on the distance to your existing gas line, the type of fire pit system you choose, and whether you need a new fire pit structure or can retrofit your existing one.

The biggest cost factor is **running a natural gas line from your home to the fire pit location**. ATCO Gas service is widely available throughout Calgary, but extending a gas line 20-50 feet across your backyard requires trenching, pipe installation, and pressure testing by a licensed gas fitter. Gas line extensions cost roughly \$15-\$25 per linear foot, so a 30-foot run adds \$450-\$750 to your project. If your fire pit is located far from your home's gas meter or requires crossing concrete patios or landscaping, costs increase significantly.

**Gas fire pit systems range from \$800-\$3,000** for the burner, control valve, and safety components. Basic round or linear burners with manual controls start around \$800-\$1,200, while premium systems with electronic ignition, flame height control, and weather-resistant components run \$2,000-\$3,000. The BTU output typically ranges from 60,000-150,000 BTU — much higher than indoor fireplaces because outdoor systems must overcome wind and ambient air temperature. During Calgary's winter months when temperatures drop to -25°C, you'll want at least 80,000-100,000 BTU for meaningful heat output.

**Professional installation is mandatory** — this isn't a DIY project. Gas line work must be performed by a licensed gas fitter, and you'll need a gas permit from the City of Calgary (approximately \$150-\$200). The installation includes trenching for the gas line, installing shutoff valves, pressure testing the system, and final inspection by a Safety Codes Officer. Many contractors can retrofit your existing stone or metal fire pit structure, but if you need a new fire pit built, add \$1,500-\$4,000 for masonry or steel fabrication work.

**Calgary's climate creates specific considerations** for outdoor gas fire pits. The extreme temperature swings from chinook winds can affect gas pressure and flame characteristics, so quality regulators and wind guards are essential. Your gas line must be buried below the frost line (approximately 4 feet deep in Calgary) to prevent freeze damage. Many homeowners install a manual shutoff valve inside their home for winter shutdown, though the system can operate year-round if properly designed.

**Operating costs are reasonable** with ATCO Gas rates around \$3.50-\$5.00 per GJ. Running a 100,000 BTU fire pit costs roughly \$3-\$5 per hour — affordable for occasional entertaining but something to consider for frequent use. The convenience factor is significant: instant ignition, adjustable flame height, no wood storage or ash cleanup, and consistent heat output regardless of weather conditions.

**Permit requirements** include a gas permit for the line extension and connection work. Some municipalities may also require a building permit if you're constructing a new permanent fire pit structure, especially if it includes seating walls or overhead structures. Check with your local municipality (Calgary, Airdrie, Cochrane, etc.) for specific requirements.

**Find local gas fitters and fire pit specialists** through the Calgary Construction Network who can assess your existing fire pit, design the gas conversion, handle permits, and complete the installation safely and to code.

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- Turnbull masonry
- UR COWRY CABINETS
- Mike's Restoration Service
- BOND CONTRACTING & CONSTRUCTION INC

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## Can I convert my Calgary gas fireplace to electric?

**Yes, you can convert a gas fireplace to electric, but it's typically not cost-effective and may not provide the heating performance you need during Calgary's brutal winters.** Most homeowners are better off keeping their gas fireplace or installing a separate electric unit elsewhere in the home.

### Why Gas-to-Electric Conversion Is Usually Not Recommended in Calgary

Gas fireplaces in Calgary provide 20,000-40,000 BTU of heat output, while electric fireplaces are limited to approximately 5,100 BTU (1,500 watts) due to standard household electrical circuits. During Calgary's -25°C to -35°C cold snaps that can last for weeks, losing that substantial heat output means giving up meaningful supplemental heating when you need it most. Your gas fireplace running on ATCO Gas costs roughly \$0.50-\$1.00 per hour to operate, while electric heating at Alberta electricity rates costs 3-4 times more per unit of energy produced.

The conversion process involves capping the gas line (requires a licensed gas fitter and gas permit), sealing the existing venting system, and installing electrical supply for the electric unit. You'll need a dedicated 20-amp circuit run by a certified electrician with an electrical permit, which typically costs \$500-\$1,200 depending on the distance from your electrical panel. The total conversion cost often exceeds \$2,000-\$4,000 when you factor in electrical work, gas line capping, vent sealing, and a quality electric fireplace unit.

### Better Alternatives for Calgary Homes

Instead of converting your gas fireplace, consider keeping it functional and adding a wall-mount electric fireplace in another room where gas venting isn't practical. Modern electric fireplaces with LED flame effects are remarkably realistic and perfect for bedrooms, home offices, or finished basements where you want ambiance without the complexity of gas lines and venting.

If you're concerned about gas safety or maintenance costs, upgrading to a newer, more efficient gas fireplace often makes more sense than converting to electric. Modern direct-vent gas fireplaces operate at 70-85% efficiency compared to older units at 50-60%, and they include advanced safety features like oxygen depletion sensors and electronic ignition systems.

### When Electric Conversion Makes Sense

Gas-to-electric conversion is worth considering if your existing gas fireplace has a cracked heat exchanger or damaged venting system that would be expensive to repair, if you're planning a major renovation where running electrical is already part of the project, or if you're converting the space to a bedroom where the Alberta Building Code restricts gas appliances.

## Professional Requirements

Any gas line work must be performed by a licensed gas fitter with a gas permit from the City of Calgary. Electrical work requires a certified electrician and electrical permit. Both trades need Safety Codes Officer inspection before the work can be considered complete.

Need help finding qualified gas fitters or electricians for your conversion project? Calgary Fireplaces can match you with local professionals through the Calgary Construction Network for free estimates on your specific situation.

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## How long does a wood-to-gas fireplace conversion take in Calgary?

**A wood-to-gas fireplace conversion in Calgary typically takes 1-3 days for the actual installation work, but the complete project timeline runs 2-4 weeks when you factor in permits, inspections, and contractor scheduling.**

The installation itself breaks down into distinct phases. Day one involves the gas fitter running a new gas line from your meter to the fireplace location, which requires trenching if running underground or routing through basement/crawl space if running overhead. This gas line work must be done by a licensed gas fitter and requires a gas permit from the City of Calgary. Day two focuses on the fireplace conversion — installing the gas insert or gas logs into your existing masonry firebox, connecting the gas line, and installing a flexible aluminum liner up your existing chimney to properly vent the new gas appliance. If your project includes new stone work, mantel installation, or surround finishing, this adds another 1-2 days depending on complexity.

**The permit and inspection process adds significant time to your project timeline.** Your gas permit application needs 3-5 business days for approval, and you'll need to schedule a Safety Codes Officer inspection once the work is complete before you can operate the fireplace. During Calgary's busy fall season (September through November), inspection scheduling can add another week to your timeline. Smart contractors apply for permits before starting work and book inspections in advance, but weather delays and inspector availability can still push timelines.

**Calgary's climate creates some unique timing considerations for wood-to-gas conversions.** Your existing masonry chimney needs inspection before conversion — Calgary's extreme freeze-thaw cycles and chinook temperature swings cause accelerated deterioration in older chimneys, and you may discover cracked liners, damaged crowns, or deteriorated mortar joints that need repair before installing your gas system. Chimney repairs are best done during warm weather months, so if major masonry work is needed, plan your conversion for late spring through early fall. However, the gas conversion work itself can be done year-round since it's mostly interior work.

**Contractor availability significantly impacts your timeline, especially during peak fireplace season.** Quality fireplace contractors in Calgary get booked solid from September through December as homeowners prepare for winter. If you're planning a conversion, start the process in late summer to avoid the fall rush. Emergency conversions during cold snaps can sometimes be expedited, but expect premium pricing and limited contractor availability when temperatures drop below -25°C and everyone wants their fireplace working.

**ATCO Gas connection timing can also affect your schedule.** If your home doesn't currently have natural gas service, adding gas service requires ATCO Gas to run a line from the street to your meter, which can take 2-4

weeks depending on excavation requirements and their scheduling. Most Calgary homes already have gas service for furnaces and water heaters, so this isn't typically a factor, but it's worth confirming early in your planning.

The total project cost for a wood-to-gas conversion in Calgary runs \$3,000-\$6,000 depending on gas line distance, insert quality, and finishing work. A basic gas log set in your existing firebox costs less than a full gas insert with new surround work. Factor in gas permit fees (\$100-\$200), potential chimney repairs if needed, and any electrical work for blower fans or electronic ignition systems.

**Need help finding a fireplace contractor for your wood-to-gas conversion?** Calgary Fireplaces can match you with local professionals who specialize in fireplace conversions and understand Calgary's permit requirements and climate challenges.

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Q8

## What efficiency improvement can I expect from converting wood to gas in Calgary?

**Converting from wood-burning to gas in Calgary typically improves your fireplace efficiency from 10-15% to 70-85% — a dramatic 5-6x improvement that transforms your fireplace from a net heat loss into a meaningful supplemental heating source during Calgary's brutal winters.**

The efficiency jump is so significant because traditional open wood-burning fireplaces are notoriously inefficient. They pull heated indoor air up the chimney for combustion, creating negative pressure that draws cold outdoor air into your home through every crack and gap. During Calgary's -30°C cold snaps, this means your furnace works overtime to replace the warm air being sucked up the chimney. You're essentially heating the outdoors while

enjoying the ambiance of a real fire.

**Modern gas inserts solve this problem completely.** A direct-vent gas insert uses sealed combustion — it draws combustion air directly from outside through a coaxial vent system and exhausts combustion products outside without affecting your indoor air. All the heat stays in your room. A quality gas insert producing 25,000-35,000 BTU can comfortably heat 800-1,200 square feet, making it a legitimate zone heating source for your main living areas. At current ATCO Gas rates of \$3.50-\$5.00 per GJ, operating costs run roughly \$0.50-\$1.00 per hour — far cheaper than electric baseboard heating and more efficient than running your furnace to heat unused rooms.

**Calgary's extreme climate makes this efficiency improvement especially valuable.** During the six-month heating season from October through April, a high-efficiency gas fireplace reduces strain on your main furnace system and provides comfortable, controllable heat exactly where you need it. The sealed combustion design also eliminates concerns about backdrafting during chinook wind events, which can cause smoke problems in traditional wood-burning fireplaces when rapid pressure changes disrupt natural chimney draft.

**The conversion process involves installing a gas insert into your existing masonry firebox and running a flexible aluminum or stainless steel liner up your existing chimney.** You'll also need a gas line connection, which requires a licensed gas fitter and gas permit from the City of Calgary. Total project costs typically range from \$2,500-\$5,500 depending on the insert model, gas line distance, and chimney condition. The existing chimney should be inspected first — older Calgary chimneys often need crown repair or relining due to freeze-thaw damage from chinook cycles.

**Beyond efficiency, you gain convenience and reliability.** Gas ignites instantly with a wall switch or remote control, requires no wood splitting or ash cleanup, and continues operating during power outages if you choose a model with standing pilot or battery backup ignition. For Calgary homeowners who want supplemental heating without the maintenance demands of wood burning, the efficiency improvement alone justifies the conversion cost within 2-3 heating seasons.

Need help finding a gas fireplace installer for your conversion project? Calgary Fireplaces can match you with local contractors who specialize in wood-to-gas conversions and understand Calgary's specific chimney challenges.

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

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Q9

## What is the cost to convert a gas fireplace from B-vent to direct vent in Calgary?

**Converting a B-vent gas fireplace to direct vent in Calgary typically costs \$2,500-\$5,500**, depending on whether you replace just the venting system or upgrade to a completely new direct-vent unit. This is a complex project that requires a licensed gas fitter and gas permit from the City of Calgary.

### Understanding the Two Conversion Approaches

The first approach involves installing a direct-vent insert into your existing B-vent firebox, which costs \$2,500-\$4,000 including the insert unit, new coaxial venting, gas line modifications, and installation labour. This option preserves your existing fireplace opening and surround while dramatically improving efficiency from roughly 50-60% (B-vent) to 75-85% (direct-vent). The existing B-vent chimney is typically abandoned and sealed, while new direct-vent piping runs horizontally through an exterior wall or vertically through the roof.

The second approach involves a complete fireplace replacement, removing the old B-vent unit entirely and installing a new direct-vent fireplace. This costs \$3,500-\$5,500 but gives you a modern unit with better heat output, improved controls, and updated safety features. You'll also have the opportunity to resize the fireplace or update the surround and mantel during this more extensive renovation.

### Calgary-Specific Considerations and Permit Requirements

Every gas fireplace conversion in Calgary requires a gas permit from the City of Calgary and must be performed by a licensed gas fitter. The permit costs approximately \$150-\$200, and a Safety Codes Officer will inspect the completed work before you can operate the converted fireplace. This inspection verifies proper gas connections, correct venting installation, adequate clearances, and overall Alberta Building Code compliance.

Calgary's extreme winter temperatures make this conversion particularly valuable for homeowners. Direct-vent fireplaces provide significantly more usable heat than B-vent units because they don't draw heated indoor air up the chimney for combustion. During Calgary's -25°C to -35°C cold snaps, this efficiency difference translates to meaningful energy savings and better supplemental heating performance. At current ATCO Gas rates of \$3.50-\$5.00 per GJ, the improved efficiency can reduce your fireplace operating costs by 20-30%.

## Venting Challenges and Installation Complexity

The most complex aspect of this conversion involves the new direct-vent system. Direct-vent fireplaces use a sealed coaxial pipe system that brings combustion air in from outside while exhausting combustion gases out through the same penetration. If your existing B-vent chimney runs straight up through the roof, the installer may be able to run the new direct-vent piping up the same chase. However, many conversions require a new horizontal vent penetration through an exterior wall, which involves cutting through siding, insulation, and interior finishing.

Calgary's chinook winds create additional venting considerations. The new direct-vent termination must be properly positioned to prevent wind-induced backdrafting during rapid pressure changes. Professional installers familiar with Calgary's climate will ensure the vent termination meets manufacturer clearance requirements from windows, doors, and other openings while accounting for local wind patterns.

## When to Consider This Conversion

This conversion makes the most sense when your existing B-vent fireplace has adequate clearances and structural support for a direct-vent unit, but you want dramatically improved heating efficiency and safety. Direct-vent units eliminate the indoor air quality concerns associated with B-vent fireplaces, which is particularly important in modern Calgary homes with tight building envelopes. The sealed combustion system also continues operating safely during power outages, unlike many B-vent units that rely on natural draft.

Calgary Fireplaces can match you with licensed gas fitters experienced in fireplace conversions who can assess your specific installation and provide detailed cost estimates. Find qualified fireplace contractors through the Calgary Construction Network directory to get multiple quotes for your conversion project.

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- Jk Stucco
- Dealtwith.
- New Earth Waste Services Ltd

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## Is a gas insert or full conversion better for my old Calgary masonry fireplace?

**A gas insert is almost always the better choice for Calgary homeowners with existing masonry fireplaces.**

Inserts are more cost-effective, faster to install, and preserve your original chimney structure while dramatically improving efficiency from 10-15% to 70-85%.

**Gas inserts offer the best value for Calgary's climate** because they transform your inefficient masonry fireplace into a serious heating appliance without the expense and complexity of full conversion. The insert slides into your existing firebox and connects to a flexible aluminum or stainless steel liner that runs up your existing chimney. Installation typically takes one day and costs \$2,500-\$5,500 including the unit, liner, gas line connection, and permits. You keep your existing mantel and hearth, so the visual impact is minimal while the heating performance is transformed.

**Full conversion involves removing the entire firebox and rebuilding with a new direct-vent gas fireplace,** which costs \$5,000-\$10,000 and requires significant masonry work. This makes sense only if your existing firebox is severely damaged, improperly sized, or if you want to completely redesign the fireplace opening and surround. The advantage is that you can choose any size or style of gas fireplace and create a completely custom look, but the cost and disruption are substantial.

**Calgary's extreme winters make efficiency the priority.** During those -25°C to -35°C cold snaps that can last for weeks, a quality gas insert providing 25,000-35,000 BTU of zone heating genuinely reduces your furnace load and keeps your main living areas comfortable. At current ATCO Gas rates of approximately \$3.50-\$5.00 per GJ, running a gas insert costs roughly \$0.50-\$1.00 per hour — far cheaper than electric baseboard heating and much more effective than your original masonry fireplace.

**Chimney condition determines feasibility for both options.** Before installing either an insert or planning conversion, have your chimney inspected. Calgary's freeze-thaw cycles and chinook wind effects accelerate mortar deterioration and can crack chimney liners. A damaged chimney needs repair before any gas appliance installation. If your chimney requires extensive structural work (\$3,000-\$5,000), full conversion might make more economic sense since you're already doing major masonry work.

**Consider insert installation if** your firebox is structurally sound, you like your current mantel and surround, you want the most cost-effective efficiency upgrade, and you don't mind the insert's slightly protruding appearance.

**Consider full conversion if** you want to completely redesign the fireplace area, your firebox is damaged or poorly proportioned, you're already renovating the room extensively, or you want a flush-mount linear fireplace that inserts cannot provide.

Both options require a gas permit from the City of Calgary and Safety Codes Officer inspection. The gas line work must be done by a licensed gas fitter, and proper venting is critical for safety and code compliance.

Need help finding a fireplace installer? Calgary Fireplaces can match you with local contractors who specialize in both inserts and conversions for free estimates on your specific project.

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**Q11**

## How much does gas line capping cost when converting from gas to electric in Calgary?

**Gas line capping in Calgary typically costs \$150-\$400 depending on the line size, location accessibility, and whether you're capping at the appliance connection or removing the line back to the main.** This work must be performed by a licensed gas fitter with a gas permit from the City of Calgary.

When converting from a gas fireplace to electric, you have two main options for dealing with the existing gas line.

**Capping at the appliance connection** is the most common and cost-effective approach — the gas fitter simply installs a permanent cap fitting where the fireplace connected to the gas line. This typically runs \$150-\$250 including the permit and Safety Codes Officer inspection. The gas line remains in place behind the wall but is safely sealed.

**Complete gas line removal** back to the main gas line or meter costs more (\$300-\$600) because it involves opening walls to access the full run of pipe, but it's the cleanest approach if you're doing major renovations and want the gas line completely gone. Some homeowners prefer removal to eliminate any future confusion about abandoned gas lines in the home.

**The gas permit is mandatory** — typically \$100-\$150 from the City of Calgary — and the work must be inspected by a Safety Codes Officer before it's considered complete. Never attempt to cap a gas line yourself or hire someone without proper gas fitting credentials. An improperly capped gas line can leak, creating explosion and carbon monoxide risks.

**Timing considerations:** If you're having the electric fireplace installed by an electrician who needs to run new wiring in the same wall area, coordinate the gas capping first so both trades aren't working around each other. The gas work needs to be completed and inspected before you can safely proceed with wall finishing around your new electric fireplace.

**Why convert from gas to electric?** The main reasons Calgary homeowners make this switch include eliminating the need for annual gas fireplace maintenance, avoiding combustion air requirements in tight modern homes, gaining more flexible placement options since electric units don't need venting, and simplifying operation — especially for secondary fireplaces in bedrooms or basement family rooms where the convenience of electric operation outweighs the higher operating costs.

At current ATCO Gas rates versus Alberta electricity costs, you'll pay roughly 3-4 times more per BTU to operate an electric fireplace compared to gas, but electric units are virtually maintenance-free and provide reliable zone heating without the complexity of gas venting systems.

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**Q12**

## Can I keep my existing mantel when converting from wood to gas in my Calgary home?

**In most cases, yes, you can keep your existing mantel when converting from wood to gas, but it must meet Alberta Building Code clearance requirements for the new gas fireplace.** The key factor is whether your current mantel maintains the minimum required distances from the gas firebox opening.

**Gas fireplaces have specific clearance requirements** that are often less restrictive than wood-burning fireplaces. Most gas fireplace manufacturers require combustible materials like wood mantels to be at least 6-12 inches above the firebox opening and 3-6 inches to the sides, though these distances vary by unit and BTU rating. Your existing mantel likely meets these requirements since wood-burning fireplaces typically have more stringent clearances, but this needs verification during the conversion planning.

**The conversion process itself involves installing a gas insert into your existing masonry firebox** and running a flexible aluminum or stainless steel liner up your existing chimney. The gas insert sits inside the firebox and doesn't typically affect the mantel structure. However, the new gas line connection requires a gas permit from the City of Calgary and must be installed by a licensed gas fitter. The Safety Codes Officer will inspect clearances to your mantel as part of the permit approval process.

**Calgary's climate makes wood-to-gas conversion extremely popular** because it transforms an inefficient masonry fireplace (10-15% efficiency) into a reliable heating appliance (70-85% efficiency) that provides meaningful supplemental heat during our brutal winters. At current ATCO Gas rates of approximately \$3.50-\$5.00 per GJ, operating costs are very reasonable compared to electric heating. Gas inserts also eliminate the maintenance headaches of wood storage, ash cleanup, and annual chimney sweeping.

**Before finalizing the conversion, have your chimney inspected** to ensure the flue liner is in good condition. Calgary's freeze-thaw cycles and chinook temperature swings can crack masonry chimney liners over time. If the existing liner is damaged, it will need repair or replacement before the gas insert installation. The gas insert's flexible liner connects to your existing chimney system, so structural integrity is essential for safe operation.

**Consider upgrading your mantel and surround during the conversion** if you want a fresh look. Many Calgary homeowners use the conversion as an opportunity to update from traditional brick or stone to modern materials like stacked ledgerstone, shiplap, or custom millwork. However, if your existing mantel is in good condition and you like the style, keeping it can save \$1,500-\$4,000 in renovation costs.

**The total conversion cost typically ranges from \$3,000-\$6,000** including the gas insert, liner, gas line connection, and permits. This is significantly less expensive than a complete fireplace renovation, making it an attractive upgrade for Calgary homes with existing masonry fireplaces.

Need help finding a fireplace contractor for your wood-to-gas conversion? Calgary Fireplaces can match you with local professionals who specialize in fireplace conversions and can assess your specific mantel clearance requirements.

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## Is it possible to convert a gas fireplace back to wood-burning in Calgary?

**Converting a gas fireplace back to wood-burning is technically possible in most cases, but it's a complex project requiring significant chimney work, permits, and WETT-certified installation.** The feasibility and cost depend entirely on your existing chimney condition and the type of gas fireplace you currently have.

### Understanding Your Current Setup

If you have a gas insert installed in an existing masonry fireplace, conversion is typically straightforward since the original firebox and chimney were designed for wood burning. The gas insert simply slides out, the gas line is capped, and the chimney needs inspection and likely relining with a stainless steel liner suitable for wood burning.

However, if you have a direct-vent gas fireplace that was installed as a complete unit, conversion becomes much more complex. These units were never designed for wood burning and would need complete removal. You'd essentially be starting from scratch with a new masonry firebox or zero-clearance wood-burning fireplace, plus a full chimney system.

### Critical Chimney Requirements

The biggest challenge in Calgary conversions is the chimney system. Gas fireplaces often use aluminum flexible liners or smaller diameter venting that's completely inadequate for wood burning. Wood-burning appliances require a full-diameter stainless steel chimney liner (typically 6-8 inches) that can handle the higher temperatures and corrosive creosote buildup that wood combustion creates.

Calgary's extreme temperature swings from chinook winds put additional stress on chimney systems. A chimney that seemed adequate for low-temperature gas combustion may have developed cracks or separation issues that become dangerous when exposed to the 1000°F+ temperatures from wood burning. Professional chimney inspection and likely full relining with insulated stainless steel liner is almost always required.

### Permits and Professional Requirements

Converting to wood burning requires a building permit from the City of Calgary for any new chimney penetrations, plus the installation must be done by a WETT-certified installer. WETT certification isn't just recommended—it's practically mandatory since most Alberta home insurance companies require a WETT inspection report for coverage on homes with wood-burning appliances.

The gas line to your existing fireplace needs to be properly capped by a licensed gas fitter, which requires a gas permit and Safety Codes Officer inspection. You cannot simply disconnect the gas line yourself.

### Cost Reality Check

Expect conversion costs of \$4,000-\$8,000 for a straightforward insert-to-wood conversion, or \$6,000-\$12,000 if you need extensive chimney work or are converting a direct-vent unit. This includes chimney relining (\$1,500-\$3,500), new wood-burning insert or zero-clearance fireplace (\$2,000-\$4,000), WETT-certified installation labor, permits, and gas line capping.

Given that a new EPA-certified wood stove with complete chimney system costs \$5,000-\$12,000 installed, conversion often doesn't make financial sense unless you have a solid existing masonry chimney in good condition.

### **Calgary Climate Considerations**

Wood burning does offer the advantage of heat during power outages—a real benefit during Calgary's severe winter storms. However, you'll be trading the convenience and efficiency of gas (70-85% efficient, instant on/off, no ash cleanup) for the authentic fire experience but lower efficiency (EPA wood stoves run 70-80% efficient, but require constant attention and maintenance).

### **When to Hire a Pro**

This entire project requires professional work—WETT-certified installer for the wood-burning system, licensed gas fitter to cap the gas line, and certified chimney inspector to assess your existing chimney condition. Never attempt gas line work yourself, and never install wood-burning appliances without proper permits and WETT certification.

Need help finding a WETT-certified fireplace installer? Calgary Fireplaces can match you with qualified professionals who can assess your specific situation and provide accurate conversion costs for your home.

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**Q14**

## Do I need a new gas line when converting my Calgary fireplace from wood to gas?

**Most wood-to-gas conversions in Calgary require a new gas line installation, as existing wood-burning fireplaces typically don't have any gas supply.** The gas line work must be done by a licensed gas fitter with a City of Calgary gas permit and Safety Codes Officer inspection.

### Gas Line Requirements for Your Conversion

Your wood-burning fireplace almost certainly doesn't have an existing gas line, so you'll need a new one run from your home's gas meter to the fireplace location. The gas fitter will install a 1/2" or 3/4" black iron pipe (depending on the distance and BTU requirements of your new gas insert or fireplace) with a manual shutoff valve near the unit. For a typical Calgary home, expect to pay \$800-\$1,500 for the gas line installation, depending on the distance from your meter and whether the line needs to run through finished walls or basement areas.

The gas line sizing depends on your new fireplace's BTU rating and the distance from the meter. A 30,000 BTU gas insert typically requires a 1/2" line for runs under 50 feet, but longer distances or higher BTU units may need 3/4" pipe. Your gas fitter will calculate the proper sizing based on ATCO Gas pressure and your specific installation requirements.

### Chimney and Venting Considerations

Converting from wood to gas also requires installing a flexible aluminum or stainless steel liner down your existing masonry chimney. Your old wood-burning chimney is too large for efficient gas venting and likely has creosote buildup that makes it unsuitable for gas use without proper lining. The liner installation typically costs \$1,200-\$2,500 depending on chimney height and condition.

Before any conversion work begins, have your chimney inspected for structural integrity. Calgary's freeze-thaw cycles and chinook temperature swings can crack chimney crowns and deteriorate mortar joints over time. A damaged chimney needs repair before it's safe to use with any fuel type.

### Permits and Professional Requirements

This conversion requires a gas permit from the City of Calgary, typically costing \$100-\$200. The gas fitter handles the permit application and coordinates the Safety Codes Officer inspection of the completed gas line and fireplace installation. Never attempt gas line work yourself – gas leaks can cause explosions or carbon monoxide poisoning, and unpermitted gas work creates insurance liability and will be flagged during home inspections.

The total project cost for a wood-to-gas conversion typically runs \$3,500-\$6,500 including the gas insert, gas line, chimney liner, permits, and professional installation. While this represents a significant investment, you'll gain the convenience of instant-on heat, no wood storage or ash cleanup, and much higher efficiency during Calgary's long

heating season.

**Need help finding a licensed gas fitter for your conversion?** Calgary Fireplaces can match you with qualified fireplace contractors who handle complete wood-to-gas conversions through the Calgary Construction Network.

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**Q15**

## Can I convert an old Calgary fireplace to a modern linear style?

**Yes, you can absolutely convert an old Calgary fireplace to a modern linear style, but the approach depends entirely on your existing fireplace type and the structural changes you're willing to make.** Most conversions involve installing a new linear gas fireplace unit and completely redesigning the surround, which typically costs \$6,000-\$12,000 for a quality transformation.

### Converting a Traditional Masonry Fireplace

If you have an old masonry fireplace with a brick firebox and chimney, you have excellent conversion potential. The existing firebox can accommodate a linear gas insert, though you'll likely need to modify the opening dimensions. Traditional fireplace openings are typically 30-36 inches wide and 24-28 inches tall, while modern linear fireplaces are 40-60 inches wide and only 12-16 inches tall. This means enlarging the width and reducing the height of the opening — structural work that requires a building permit and professional masonry contractor.

The existing chimney becomes an asset rather than a limitation. You'll install a flexible stainless steel liner down the chimney to vent the new gas insert, which is far less expensive than creating new venting. The gas line connection is straightforward since most Calgary homes already have natural gas service from ATCO Gas. A licensed gas fitter runs a new line to the fireplace location and installs the gas permit-required connections.

## **Converting an Existing Gas Fireplace**

If your old fireplace is already gas-fired but has a traditional rectangular firebox, conversion is more complex. You're essentially removing the existing unit and installing a completely new linear fireplace, which may require modifying the existing vent penetration. Direct-vent linear fireplaces use specific coaxial vent pipe that may not match your existing vent size or location. The gas line connections can often be reused, but the venting typically needs modification or complete replacement.

## **The Linear Fireplace Advantage in Calgary**

Linear fireplaces are particularly well-suited to Calgary homes because they provide excellent heat distribution across wide spaces. A 48-inch linear unit producing 30,000-35,000 BTU creates a broad heat pattern that's ideal for open-concept living areas common in newer Calgary homes. During those brutal January cold snaps when temperatures hit -30°C, the wide heat distribution helps warm your main living space more effectively than a traditional centered fireplace.

## **Surround and Finishing Considerations**

The visual transformation is often more dramatic than the mechanical conversion. Modern linear fireplaces pair beautifully with floor-to-ceiling stone feature walls, floating wood mantels, or sleek tile surrounds. Popular Calgary choices include stacked ledgerstone, large-format porcelain tiles, or reclaimed wood accent walls. The wide, low profile of linear fireplaces creates a contemporary focal point that completely changes the room's aesthetic.

## **Costs and Timeline**

Expect \$6,000-\$12,000 for a complete conversion including the linear gas unit (\$2,500-\$4,500), professional installation with gas permit (\$1,500-\$2,500), masonry modification if needed (\$1,000-\$2,500), and custom surround finishing (\$1,500-\$3,500). The project typically takes 3-5 days once materials arrive, though custom stonework may extend the timeline.

## **Permit Requirements**

Any gas fireplace conversion requires a gas permit from the City of Calgary and Safety Codes Officer inspection. If you're modifying the masonry opening significantly, you may also need a building permit. Structural changes to load-bearing elements definitely require engineering review and building permits.

Need help finding a fireplace contractor experienced with linear conversions? Calgary Fireplaces can match you with professionals who specialize in modern fireplace transformations and understand Calgary's specific permit requirements.

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## What is the price to upgrade a 1990s gas fireplace to a modern high-efficiency unit in Calgary?

**Upgrading a 1990s gas fireplace to a modern high-efficiency unit in Calgary typically costs \$3,500-\$7,500 installed, depending on the existing setup and new unit specifications.** The total project cost breaks down into the new fireplace unit (\$1,800-\$4,000), installation labor (\$800-\$1,500), potential venting modifications (\$500-\$1,200), gas permit and inspection (\$150-\$250), and any finishing work like surround updates (\$500-\$2,000).

### Why This Upgrade Makes Sense in Calgary

Your 1990s gas fireplace likely operates at 60-70% efficiency, while modern direct-vent units achieve 75-85% efficiency ratings. During Calgary's brutal winter months when you're running the fireplace regularly from October through April, this efficiency improvement translates to meaningful savings on your ATCO Gas bills. At current Calgary gas rates of approximately \$3.50-\$5.00 per GJ, a high-efficiency fireplace costs roughly \$0.50-\$0.80 per hour to operate versus \$0.70-\$1.10 for your older unit. Over a full heating season of heavy use, the efficiency gain can save \$200-\$400 annually.

Modern units also provide better heat distribution with variable-speed blowers, more realistic flame patterns, and improved safety features like oxygen depletion sensors and automatic shut-off systems. Given Calgary's extreme temperature swings during chinook events, newer units handle rapid pressure changes better and maintain more consistent operation.

### Installation Considerations for 1990s Units

Most 1990s gas fireplaces used B-vent (natural draft) systems rather than the direct-vent (sealed combustion) technology that dominates today's market. If your existing fireplace has a B-vent chimney, you'll likely need to install new direct-vent piping, which can exit horizontally through an exterior wall or vertically through the existing chimney chase. Horizontal venting through a wall is typically \$300-\$600 less expensive than vertical venting and is the preferred method for most Calgary installations.

The existing gas line may need upgrading depending on the BTU rating of your new unit. Modern high-efficiency fireplaces range from 20,000-40,000 BTU, and if you're upgrading to a larger unit, the gas fitter may need to run a larger diameter line from your meter. This gas line work requires a licensed gas fitter and gas permit from the City of Calgary, with a Safety Codes Officer inspection before the new fireplace can be operated.

### Cost Breakdown by Fireplace Type

A **mid-range direct-vent gas fireplace** (25,000-30,000 BTU) from brands like Napoleon, Regency, or Valor runs \$2,200-\$3,500 for the unit, plus \$1,000-\$1,800 for installation including new venting. **Premium linear or**

**contemporary units** with larger viewing areas and advanced features cost \$3,200-\$5,000 for the unit, with similar installation costs.

If your existing surround and mantel are in good condition and properly sized for the new unit, you can reuse them. However, many homeowners upgrading from 1990s fireplaces take the opportunity to modernize the entire fireplace wall with natural stone, shiplap, or tile surrounds, adding \$1,500-\$4,000 to the project.

### Timing and Permits

Gas fireplace replacement requires a gas permit and Safety Codes Officer inspection, typically adding \$150-\$250 to your project cost. The work can be completed year-round, but fall scheduling (September-November) often has longer wait times as contractors prepare for the heating season. Spring and summer installations may offer better pricing and faster scheduling.

### When to Hire a Professional

All gas line work, venting modifications, and fireplace installation must be performed by licensed professionals. The gas fitting requires a licensed gas fitter, and any electrical work for blowers or controls needs a certified electrician. Attempting DIY gas work violates the Alberta Building Code and creates serious safety risks.

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**Q17**

## Can I convert my old Calgary fireplace to an ethanol or bioethanol unit?

**While ethanol fireplaces are available in Calgary, converting an existing fireplace to ethanol is generally not recommended and may not be practical or safe for most Calgary homes.**

Ethanol fireplaces are standalone decorative units that burn liquid ethanol fuel — they don't connect to your existing gas line, chimney, or electrical system. Converting a traditional fireplace would essentially mean removing the existing fireplace entirely and installing a new ethanol unit in its place, which defeats the purpose of a "conversion."

### **Why Ethanol Fireplaces Don't Work Well in Calgary's Climate**

Ethanol fireplaces produce minimal heat output — typically 3,000-9,000 BTU compared to 25,000-40,000 BTU from a gas fireplace. During Calgary's brutal winter months when temperatures drop to -25°C to -35°C, an ethanol fireplace provides virtually no meaningful supplemental heating. You're essentially paying for ambiance only, which is an expensive proposition when ATCO Gas rates make gas fireplaces cost-effective for actual heating at roughly \$0.50-\$1.00 per hour of operation.

Ethanol fuel costs approximately \$3-\$5 per liter in Calgary, and most ethanol fireplaces burn 0.5-1.5 liters per hour. This means operating costs of \$1.50-\$7.50 per hour — significantly more expensive than gas fireplaces and without the heating benefit that makes fireplaces valuable during Calgary's six-month heating season.

### **Safety and Code Considerations**

Ethanol fireplaces burn with an open flame and require proper ventilation despite being marketed as "ventless." The Alberta Building Code requires adequate combustion air and ventilation for any open-flame appliance. In Calgary's tight, well-insulated modern homes, indoor air quality can become a concern with any fuel-burning appliance that exhausts into the living space.

Unlike gas fireplaces with safety shutoffs and oxygen depletion sensors, ethanol fireplaces rely on manual fuel management. Spilling liquid ethanol near an open flame creates serious fire risks. There's no automatic shutoff if something goes wrong.

### **Better Conversion Options for Calgary Homes**

If you have an existing masonry fireplace, a **gas insert conversion** (\$2,500-\$5,500 installed) transforms it into an efficient 70-85% heating appliance. This requires running a gas line and installing a flexible liner up your existing chimney, plus a gas permit and Safety Codes Officer inspection.

For homes without gas access, an **electric fireplace insert** (\$1,500-\$4,000 installed) provides reliable zone heating up to 5,100 BTU with realistic flame effects and no venting requirements. While less heat output than gas, electric is far more practical than ethanol for Calgary's climate.

### **When Ethanol Might Make Sense**

Ethanol fireplaces work best as decorative accent pieces in condos or spaces where gas venting is impossible and you want the ambiance of real flames. They're portable, require no installation, and can be moved between rooms. However, treat them as expensive decorative lighting rather than heating appliances.

**Need help finding a fireplace contractor for a proper gas or electric conversion? Calgary Fireplaces can match you with local installers who specialize in transforming old fireplaces into efficient heating appliances that actually make sense for Calgary's climate.**

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**Q18**

## **Is it cheaper to convert wood to gas or install a brand new gas fireplace in Calgary?**

**Converting an existing wood-burning fireplace to gas is typically \$1,000-\$3,000 cheaper than installing a brand new gas fireplace in Calgary**, assuming your existing masonry chimney is in good structural condition and can accommodate a gas liner.

**Wood-to-gas conversion costs** range from \$2,500-\$5,500 in Calgary, which includes a gas insert unit (\$1,500-\$3,500), flexible aluminum or stainless steel liner installation (\$800-\$1,500), gas line connection by a licensed gas fitter (\$400-\$800), and the required gas permit and Safety Codes Officer inspection (\$100-\$200). You're essentially retrofitting your existing firebox and chimney rather than building from scratch.

**New gas fireplace installation** runs \$4,000-\$8,000 for a complete project, including the direct-vent unit (\$2,000-\$4,500), venting through an exterior wall or roof (\$500-\$1,200), gas line installation (\$400-\$800), framing and finishing work (\$800-\$1,500), and permits. The higher cost reflects the need to create a new fireplace location, run

new venting, and complete all the finishing work around a brand new installation.

**The conversion advantage disappears if your chimney needs major repair work.** Before converting, you need a thorough chimney inspection to check for cracked liners, deteriorated mortar joints, damaged crowns, or structural issues. Calgary's extreme freeze-thaw cycles and chinook wind effects accelerate chimney deterioration, especially in homes built before 1980. If your chimney needs relining (\$1,500-\$3,500), crown repair (\$500-\$1,500), or extensive tuckpointing (\$15-\$30 per square foot), the total conversion cost can exceed new installation costs.

**Efficiency considerations also matter for the long-term value.** Your existing masonry fireplace operates at only 10-15% efficiency, losing most heat up the chimney. A gas insert conversion achieves 70-85% efficiency, while a new direct-vent gas fireplace reaches 75-85% efficiency. Both provide substantial heating improvement, but the new unit may have slightly better efficiency ratings and longer warranty coverage.

**ATCO Gas availability makes both options cost-effective to operate** in Calgary, with running costs of roughly \$0.50-\$1.00 per hour at current natural gas rates. The conversion route makes sense when you love the existing fireplace location and your chimney passes inspection. New installation gives you complete flexibility in placement and the latest efficiency technology.

**Both projects require gas permits and Safety Codes Officer inspection** — never attempt DIY gas line work. A licensed gas fitter must handle all gas connections, and the completed installation needs approval before operation.

Need help finding a fireplace contractor to evaluate your conversion options? Calgary Fireplaces can match you with local professionals who can assess your chimney condition and provide accurate cost comparisons for your specific situation.

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## Can I convert my Calgary wood fireplace to a gas log set instead of an insert?

**Yes, you can convert your wood fireplace to a gas log set, but it's generally not the best choice for Calgary's climate.** Gas log sets are designed primarily for ambiance rather than heating efficiency, which doesn't align well with Calgary's brutal winters where you want meaningful supplemental heat from your fireplace.

**Gas log sets operate as decorative appliances** that burn gas through ceramic logs designed to look like real wood. They're installed directly in your existing masonry firebox and vent up through your existing chimney, just like a wood fire would. The flames look quite realistic, and you get the convenience of instant on/off operation with a remote control or wall switch. Installation costs typically run \$1,500-\$3,500 including the gas line connection and permit.

However, **gas log sets have significant drawbacks for Calgary homes.** They operate at only 10-20% efficiency — meaning 80-90% of the heat goes straight up the chimney rather than into your room. During Calgary's -25°C to -35°C winter cold snaps, a gas log set provides minimal useful heat while consuming substantial natural gas. At current ATCO Gas rates of \$3.50-\$5.00 per GJ, you'll spend \$1-\$2 per hour operating a gas log set while getting very little warmth in return. The open damper also allows heated indoor air to escape up the chimney even when the gas logs aren't running.

**A gas insert is almost always the better choice** for Calgary homeowners. Gas inserts slide into your existing firebox, seal it off, and operate at 70-85% efficiency while providing 25,000-40,000 BTU of actual room heating. Yes, inserts cost more upfront (\$2,500-\$5,500 versus \$1,500-\$3,500 for gas logs), but they pay for themselves through lower operating costs and meaningful heat output during Calgary's six-month heating season. An insert also allows you to close the damper when not in use, preventing heat loss up the chimney.

**Both options require the same permits and safety considerations.** You'll need a gas permit from the City of Calgary, gas line installation by a licensed gas fitter, and Safety Codes Officer inspection. Your existing chimney should be inspected for structural integrity, proper liner condition, and adequate draft before either installation. Calgary's chinook winds can cause draft issues that affect both gas logs and inserts.

**Consider gas logs only if** your primary goal is occasional ambiance rather than supplemental heating, you have excellent primary heating that doesn't need assistance, or budget constraints make an insert impractical. For most Calgary homeowners dealing with high heating costs and long winters, a gas insert delivers far better value and comfort.

Need help finding a fireplace contractor to evaluate your conversion options? Calgary Fireplaces can match you with local professionals who can assess your existing chimney and recommend the best solution for your specific

situation and heating needs.

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**Q20**

## **What happens to my existing chimney when I convert from wood to gas in Calgary?**

**When converting from wood to gas in Calgary, your existing masonry chimney typically stays in place but requires a new stainless steel or aluminum liner specifically sized for the gas appliance.** The chimney structure itself usually remains functional, but the interior flue system needs to be completely updated to meet gas venting requirements under the Alberta Building Code.

### **Chimney Liner Replacement is Essential**

Your existing clay tile liner or deteriorated masonry flue cannot be used for gas appliances. Gas combustion produces different byproducts than wood — including water vapor and acids that can damage masonry over time. A new flexible stainless steel liner (typically 4-inch or 5-inch diameter for most residential gas inserts) gets installed down the full height of your chimney, from the new gas insert connection point to a new termination cap at the top. This liner is specifically engineered for gas venting temperatures and corrosion resistance.

The liner installation process involves dropping the flexible stainless steel pipe down your existing chimney chase, connecting it to your new gas insert at the bottom, and sealing it with a new chimney cap and storm collar at the top. Any gaps between the new liner and old flue get sealed to prevent moisture infiltration. This work requires a gas permit from the City of Calgary and must be done by a licensed gas fitter, followed by a Safety Codes Officer inspection.

## **Chimney Condition Assessment First**

Before any conversion work begins, your chimney needs a thorough inspection to ensure the masonry structure can safely support a gas liner system. Calgary's extreme freeze-thaw cycles and chinook temperature swings are particularly hard on masonry chimneys — crown cracking, mortar joint deterioration, and structural settling are common in chimneys over 15-20 years old. If your chimney has significant structural issues, these must be repaired before the gas conversion can proceed.

The inspection should check for: cracked or missing mortar joints, damaged chimney crown, loose or missing bricks, proper chimney height and clearances from roof lines, and adequate structural support for the new liner system. Minor tuckpointing or crown sealing can often be completed as part of the conversion project, but major structural repairs may require masonry work before the gas installation.

## **Cost and Practical Considerations**

A complete wood-to-gas conversion in Calgary typically costs \$3,500-\$6,500, including the gas insert unit, chimney liner, gas line connection, permits, and installation labor. The chimney liner portion represents about \$800-\$1,500 of this total cost. This is significantly less expensive than removing the existing chimney or installing a completely new direct-vent gas fireplace with wall or roof penetration.

Calgary's long heating season makes this conversion particularly valuable — you'll transform a 10-15% efficient wood-burning fireplace into a 70-85% efficient gas heating appliance that provides consistent, controllable heat throughout the six-month winter period. At current ATCO Gas rates of approximately \$3.50-\$5.00 per GJ, operating costs are far lower than electric heating and more convenient than sourcing, storing, and handling firewood.

## **Timeline and Seasonal Considerations**

The conversion work can be completed year-round, but fall scheduling (September-October) is ideal to have your new gas system ready for Calgary's early winter cold snaps. The chimney liner installation takes 1-2 days, followed by gas line connection and final inspection. Any required masonry repairs are best completed during warmer months when mortar cures properly.

Need help finding a qualified gas fitter for your wood-to-gas conversion? Calgary Fireplaces can match you with local contractors experienced in chimney liner installations and gas insert systems through the Calgary Construction Network.

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Q21

## How much does it cost to seal my old chimney after converting to a direct-vent gas fireplace?

**Sealing an old chimney after converting to a direct-vent gas fireplace typically costs \$800-\$2,500 in Calgary, depending on the chimney size, condition, and sealing method used.**

When you install a direct-vent gas fireplace, you're bypassing the existing chimney entirely since direct-vent units exhaust through a wall or dedicated roof penetration. This leaves your old chimney unused, and proper sealing prevents water infiltration, heat loss, and wildlife entry while maintaining structural integrity.

**Top sealing** is the most common and cost-effective approach, running \$800-\$1,500 for most Calgary homes. This involves installing a permanent chimney cap or crown seal at the top of the flue, often combined with a damper closure at the fireplace opening. The contractor removes the existing chimney cap, seals the flue opening with a metal plate or specialized cap, and ensures proper drainage around the crown. This method works well for structurally sound chimneys that you might want to reactivate in the future.

**Complete chimney abandonment** costs \$1,200-\$2,500 and involves filling portions of the flue with insulation or foam, sealing both top and bottom openings, and sometimes removing the chimney above the roofline. This permanent solution provides better insulation and eliminates ongoing maintenance concerns, but makes future reactivation impossible. It's often preferred for older masonry chimneys showing deterioration from Calgary's freeze-thaw cycles and chinook temperature swings.

**Calgary's climate makes proper chimney sealing critical** because unsealed flues create significant heat loss during our long heating season and allow moisture infiltration that accelerates freeze-thaw damage to masonry. An unsealed chimney acts like a 6-8 inch hole in your roof, allowing warm air to escape and cold air to enter. With heating costs rising and ATCO Gas rates fluctuating, eliminating this heat loss pays for itself within 2-3 years.

**The sealing work requires careful attention to building envelope integrity.** Simply capping the top without addressing the fireplace opening creates a dead air space that can cause condensation problems. Professional sealing includes vapor barriers, insulation, and proper air sealing at both ends. Some contractors recommend leaving the damper partially open to allow air circulation, while others prefer complete sealing with insulation fill.

**Permit requirements vary by scope** — simple cap installation typically doesn't require permits, but structural modifications or significant masonry work may need City of Calgary building permits. The work should be done during Calgary's warmer months (May through September) when masonry sealants cure properly and weather conditions allow safe roof access.

**Timing considerations matter** because this work is often part of a larger fireplace conversion project. Coordinate chimney sealing with your direct-vent installation to ensure the new fireplace venting doesn't interfere with chimney access. Some homeowners delay sealing for a year to ensure the new gas fireplace meets their heating needs before permanently abandoning the chimney option.

Need help finding a contractor experienced with chimney sealing after gas fireplace conversions? Calgary Fireplaces can match you with professionals who understand both the technical requirements and Calgary's specific climate challenges.

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## How much does it cost to convert a wood fireplace to gas in Calgary?

**Converting a wood-burning fireplace to gas in Calgary typically costs \$2,500-\$5,500, depending on your existing chimney condition, gas line requirements, and the type of gas insert you choose.**

The conversion process involves installing a gas fireplace insert into your existing masonry firebox and connecting it to your home's natural gas supply. Since ATCO Gas serves virtually all of Calgary and surrounding communities at competitive rates (\$3.50-\$5.00 per GJ), this conversion makes excellent financial sense — you'll pay roughly \$0.50-\$1.00 per hour to operate a gas insert versus the time and expense of sourcing, splitting, and storing firewood through Calgary's six-month heating season.

### Gas Insert Options and Pricing

A basic gas insert ranges from \$1,200-\$2,500, while premium models with larger viewing areas, realistic log sets, and remote controls cost \$2,500-\$4,000. Popular brands in Calgary include Napoleon, Regency, and Valor. The insert must be sized appropriately for your existing firebox — most Calgary homes built before 1980 have masonry fireplaces that accommodate standard 25,000-35,000 BTU inserts, which provide meaningful supplemental heat during those brutal -25°C to -35°C January cold snaps.

### Installation Requirements and Costs

Every gas conversion requires a flexible aluminum or stainless steel liner installed up your existing chimney (\$800-\$1,500), plus a gas line connection from your home's natural gas supply to the fireplace location (\$500-\$1,200 depending on distance and accessibility). A licensed gas fitter must perform all gas work, and you'll need a gas permit from the City of Calgary (\$100-\$200) plus Safety Codes Officer inspection before the unit can operate.

### Chimney Condition is Critical

Before any conversion, your existing chimney needs professional inspection. Calgary's extreme freeze-thaw cycles and chinook wind events accelerate masonry deterioration — cracked chimney crowns, deteriorated mortar joints, and damaged flue tiles are common in older homes. If your chimney needs structural repair, crown rebuilding, or tuckpointing, add \$1,500-\$4,000 to your project cost. However, this repair work is often necessary regardless of conversion and addresses safety issues that could affect your home insurance.

### Efficiency and Comfort Benefits

Your current masonry fireplace operates at roughly 10-15% efficiency and actually pulls heated air from your home up the chimney. A gas insert operates at 70-85% efficiency and provides consistent, controllable heat without the mess of ash cleanup or the effort of maintaining a wood fire. During Calgary's long heating season, this efficiency

difference translates to real comfort and energy savings.

### Timeline and Permits

The conversion typically takes 1-2 days once permits are approved and materials arrive. Gas permit processing takes 1-2 weeks in Calgary. Schedule the work for fall if possible — demand peaks in October and November as homeowners prepare for winter, and you'll want your new gas fireplace ready for those first cold snaps.

Need help finding a qualified gas fitter and fireplace installer? Calgary Fireplaces can match you with local contractors who specialize in wood-to-gas conversions and understand Calgary's specific chimney challenges.

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**Q23**

## How much does it cost to convert a propane fireplace to natural gas in Calgary?

**Converting a propane fireplace to natural gas in Calgary typically costs \$300-\$800 for the conversion kit and labour, plus \$800-\$2,500 for running a new natural gas line from your meter to the fireplace location.**

The total project cost ranges from \$1,100-\$3,300 depending on the distance of the gas line run and complexity of the installation.

**The conversion process involves two main components.** First, your existing propane fireplace needs a natural gas conversion kit, which includes new burner orifices, gas valve spring, and regulator components designed for natural gas's lower pressure (7" water column versus propane's 11" water column). Most quality fireplace manufacturers like Napoleon, Regency, and Heat & Glo offer factory conversion kits for \$150-\$400. The labour to install the conversion kit typically runs \$150-\$400 and must be performed by a licensed gas fitter.

**The bigger expense is usually the natural gas line installation.** If your home already has ATCO Gas service but no existing gas line near the fireplace, you'll need a new branch line run from your gas meter or an existing gas appliance. Gas line installation costs \$15-\$25 per linear foot for basic runs, but can reach \$35-\$50 per foot if the route requires going through finished walls, around obstacles, or under concrete slabs. A typical 30-50 foot run from the basement gas meter to a main floor fireplace costs \$800-\$1,500 in labour and materials.

**Calgary's widespread ATCO Gas availability makes this conversion financially attractive.** Natural gas currently costs approximately \$3.50-\$5.00 per GJ compared to propane at \$25-\$35 per GJ delivered in Calgary. For a fireplace that operates 3-4 hours daily during Calgary's six-month heating season, switching from propane to natural gas saves \$400-\$800 annually in fuel costs. The conversion typically pays for itself within 2-3 years through lower operating costs.

**Every natural gas conversion requires a gas permit** from the City of Calgary and inspection by a Safety Codes Officer. The gas line work must be performed by a licensed gas fitter who will obtain the permit (typically \$100-\$200) and ensure the installation meets Alberta Building Code requirements. The inspector verifies proper gas pressures, leak testing, and combustion air supply before approving the conversion.

**Not all propane fireplaces can be converted to natural gas.** Check your owner's manual or the rating plate inside the fireplace to confirm a conversion kit is available. Some older or budget-model fireplaces were designed exclusively for propane and cannot be safely converted. Additionally, if your propane fireplace is vent-free, converting it to natural gas may require upgrading to a direct-vent system depending on room size and ventilation requirements under current Alberta Building Code standards.

**The conversion work must be done by a licensed gas fitter** — never attempt this as a DIY project. Incorrect gas pressures, improper orifice sizing, or faulty connections can cause incomplete combustion, carbon monoxide production, or gas leaks. A qualified gas fitter will pressure-test the system, verify proper flame characteristics, and ensure the fireplace operates safely on natural gas.

Need help finding a licensed gas fitter for your propane-to-natural gas conversion? Calgary Fireplaces can match you with qualified professionals who handle fireplace conversions throughout the Calgary area.

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Q24

## Do I need permits for a fireplace conversion in Calgary?

**Yes, fireplace conversions in Calgary require permits.** A gas permit is mandatory for any conversion involving gas line work, and you may need additional permits depending on the specific type of conversion and structural modifications involved.

**Gas permits are required for all gas-related conversions** in Calgary. Whether you're converting from wood-to-gas, installing a gas insert into an existing masonry fireplace, or switching from one gas appliance to another, the gas line connection and appliance installation must be done by a licensed gas fitter with a proper gas permit from the City of Calgary. The permit typically costs \$100-\$200, and a Safety Codes Officer will inspect the completed work to verify gas connections, venting, clearances, and overall compliance with the Alberta Building Code before you can operate the new fireplace.

**Wood-to-gas conversions are the most common type** in Calgary and involve installing a gas insert or direct-vent gas fireplace into an existing masonry firebox. This requires a gas permit for the gas line work and insert installation. You'll also need to install a flexible aluminum or stainless steel liner up the existing chimney to properly vent the gas appliance. While the existing chimney structure remains, the new venting system and gas connections require professional installation and inspection. The gas fitter will assess whether your existing chimney is suitable for the conversion or needs repair work first.

**Electric conversions typically require electrical permits** when installing a hardwired electric fireplace or running a new dedicated circuit. Simple plug-in electric units on existing outlets don't need permits, but built-in electric fireplaces often require a dedicated 20-amp circuit and electrical permit. The electrical work must be done by a certified electrician and inspected by a Safety Codes Officer.

**Building permits may be required** for structural modifications during the conversion. If you're removing or modifying the existing firebox, installing new framing for a different fireplace type, or making significant changes to the hearth or surround, you'll need a building permit from Calgary Planning & Development. However, straightforward insert installations into existing fireboxes typically don't require building permits since they use the existing structure.

**WETT certification becomes important** if you're converting TO a wood-burning appliance rather than away from one. While not legally required under the Alberta Building Code, most Alberta home insurance companies require a WETT inspection report for homes with wood-burning appliances. A WETT-certified installer provides documentation that the work meets Canadian standards for wood-burning installations.

**Chimney inspection is crucial before any conversion** involving the existing chimney system. Calgary's extreme freeze-thaw cycles and chinook winds accelerate chimney deterioration, and many older masonry chimneys have cracked liners, deteriorated mortar joints, or structural issues that must be addressed before installing a new appliance. A professional assessment ensures the chimney can safely handle the new fireplace type.

**The permit process protects your safety and investment.** Unpermitted gas work is a serious safety hazard that can cause carbon monoxide poisoning or gas leaks. It's also an insurance liability and will be flagged during home inspections if you sell your property. The inspection process ensures your conversion meets current safety standards and operates efficiently during Calgary's long heating season.

Need help finding a licensed gas fitter or fireplace contractor for your conversion project? Calgary Fireplaces can match you with qualified professionals who handle permits and ensure your conversion meets all Alberta Building Code requirements.

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## How much will I save on heating by converting from wood to gas in Calgary?

**Converting from wood to gas in Calgary typically saves \$800-\$1,500 per heating season while dramatically reducing maintenance time and effort.** The exact savings depend on your current wood consumption, gas fireplace efficiency, and how much you rely on the fireplace for supplemental heating during Calgary's long winter season.

### Wood vs Gas Operating Costs in Calgary

Wood heating costs in Calgary range from \$200-\$400 per cord for seasoned hardwood, with most homeowners burning 3-5 cords per heating season depending on usage patterns. At current prices, that's \$600-\$2,000 annually just for fuel. A high-efficiency gas fireplace or insert running on ATCO Gas at approximately \$4.00 per GJ costs roughly \$0.75-\$1.00 per hour to operate. Even with heavy use during Calgary's October-through-April heating season, annual gas costs typically run \$400-\$800 for supplemental heating.

The efficiency difference is dramatic. Traditional open wood fireplaces operate at only 10-15% efficiency, meaning 85-90% of the heat goes up the chimney. A modern gas insert or direct-vent gas fireplace operates at 70-85% efficiency, delivering far more usable heat per dollar spent. This efficiency advantage becomes especially valuable during Calgary's brutal January and February cold snaps when you need consistent, reliable heat output.

### Maintenance and Labor Savings

Beyond fuel costs, wood-to-gas conversion eliminates significant maintenance expenses and labor. Wood burning requires annual chimney sweeping (\$200-\$350 in Calgary), regular ash removal, wood stacking and storage, and dealing with creosote buildup. Calgary's chinook winds create additional challenges for wood-burning fireplaces, as rapid pressure changes can cause backdrafting and smoke issues. Gas fireplaces need only annual service (\$150-\$250) with no ash cleanup, no wood handling, and no weather-related draft problems.

### Calgary Climate Considerations

Calgary's extreme temperature swings make gas conversion particularly attractive. During chinook events, when temperatures can rise 30 degrees in hours, gas fireplaces respond instantly to thermostat control while wood fires continue burning regardless of outdoor conditions. Gas fireplaces with electronic ignition or battery backup continue providing heat during power outages that commonly occur during severe winter storms.

### Conversion Project Costs

A wood-to-gas conversion typically costs \$2,500-\$5,500 in Calgary, depending on the gas insert model and whether your existing chimney needs a new liner. The project requires a flexible aluminum or stainless steel liner up

the existing chimney, a gas line connection by a licensed gas fitter, and a gas permit from the City of Calgary. Most homeowners recover the conversion cost within 2-4 years through fuel savings and reduced maintenance.

### **When Gas Conversion Makes Most Sense**

The savings are greatest for homeowners who currently use their wood fireplace as primary or significant supplemental heating. If you only burn occasional recreational fires, the cost savings will be minimal. However, if you're burning 3+ cords annually and using the fireplace regularly during Calgary's heating season, gas conversion typically pays for itself quickly while providing the convenience of instant on/off control and consistent heat output.

Need help finding a fireplace contractor for your wood-to-gas conversion? Calgary Fireplaces can match you with local professionals who specialize in fireplace conversions and can provide accurate cost estimates based on your specific chimney condition and heating needs.

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