

POST CHRISTMAS SEASON / NACHWEIHNACHTZEIT

New Year's Eve: Silvesterabend (der 31. Dezember)

New Years Eve custom: Silvesterabendsitte

chimney sweep: der Schornsteinfeger, die Schornsteinfeger

With the smashing of the monopoly, he said, homeowners will have to be better informed about what needs to be done and what it should cost. In addition, he warned, private companies will frequently be affiliated with specific manufacturers and thus less straightforward in advising clients.

"I hope we don't come under so much pressure that we lose our neutrality because that's our most valuable asset -- people trust us," he said.

Skrobek currently pulls down €150,000 (\$198,000) per year for his district duties and pays his employees' wages and benefits out of that sum.

The market already opened a crack in 2009, when Germany was forced to allow in sweeps from other EU countries. But low statutory prices made the move unappealing to most foreign firms.

In addition, the wages of district chimney sweeps are generally set down in regional rates so that little flexibility is possible, despite complaints by consumer advocates.

"The chimney sweeps have no say in the fees for their statutory work because there is an official price list," the guild master for Berlin, Heiko Kirmis, explained.

"For these jobs, chimney sweeps will try to maintain the old prices for as long as possible."

Chimney Sweep Versus the Western Jackdaw

Sep 27, 2012

"There was smoke everywhere in the house. We had to hold up damp cloths to our faces and get out of there!" said Margot Heinen, relating a recent fireplace mishap. In the past few days the air had gotten cooler and the 47-year-old from the small Bavarian town of Bad Wörishofen thought to start a fire in her cockle stove. There was one thing she had not been aware of: a western jackdaw had nested in her chimney completely blocking the passage so that the smoke had no exit. It is not an uncommon experience of chimney owners in the first days of fall.

Oswald Wilhelm, Bavarian guild master – a time-honored and high-ranking position amongst craftsmen – says this time of year he receives several complaints from chimney sweeps throughout the state citing problems with the small black crows. "No one thinks about it in the spring when the jackdaws are nesting that the first fires will be lit in the fall," says Wilhelm. Other chimney problems the guild master noted were wild bees as well as wasp and hornet nests.

Master chimney sweep Christian Hehn and his co-workers often need to employ special equipment to deal with the homes of the feathered pests. They usually remove a considerable pile of twigs, grass,
