

FIRE LINE: Clothes Dryer Fires

Very few people realize the importance of clothes dryer maintenance. However, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, there are an estimated 15,500 fires, 10 deaths and 10 injuries due to clothes dryer fires each year. Several hundred people a year are also subjected to carbon monoxide poisoning from improper dryer vent setups. In some cases, faulty appliances are to blame, but many fires can be prevented with proper dryer venting, and lint trap cleaning.

Traditionally, most clothes dryers were in the basement. However, nowadays many newer homes tend to have dryers located away from an outside wall in bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens and hall closets. These new locations mean dryers tend to be vented longer distances and vents are generally installed with sharp turns and bends to accommodate the structure of the home. As a result, dryer vents are harder to reach, and create more places for lint to gather. Lint is highly combustible. Its accumulation can reduce airflow and create conditions ripe for a fire. The ideal solution is to have short, straight, dryer duct venting.

If you notice your dryer is taking longer than it used to, to dry a load of clothes, or if the clothes come out hotter than normal or the flapper on the dryer vent doesn't open, there may be a problem.

Some safety tips to guard against clothes dryer fires:

- Always clean the lint filter before and after each load
- Check the outside exhaust while the dryer is operating to make sure air is escaping normally. If it is not, look for kinks or signs of crushing in the vent ductwork
- Make sure the dryer ductwork is made from solid metallic material whenever possible. Follow the manufacturers recommendations when installing new ductwork. Keep the length of the ductwork to a minimum, avoid sharp bends and do not use screws to hold the pipe together.
- Dryer ductwork should always be vented to the outside of the home, NEVER to an attic or crawlspace.

- Use a lint brush or vacuum attachment to remove accumulated lint from under the lint trap, under and behind the dryer where lint and dust can accumulate.
- Take special care with drying clothes that have been soiled with volatile chemicals like gasoline, cooking oils, cleaning agents, finishing oils and stains. Even after they have been washed, some residue can linger and they can ignite in a dryer.
- Finally, DO NOT LEAVE THE DRYER RUNNING WHEN YOU ARE ASLEEP OR AWAY FROM THE HOUSE!

If all else fails, summer will soon be here and you can use an old fashion clothesline. I do not believe we have never been called for a clothesline fire.

Stay safe,
Deputy Fire Chief
Scott Hopkins