



# Dryer Vent Maintenance Could Save Your House

## Why an Annual Inspection is Recommended

Inspecting your dryer vents each year can help prevent unnecessary deaths and injuries because of fire and carbon monoxide poisoning, says the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. The commission estimated that in 1998, clothes dryers were associated with 15,600 fires, which resulted in 20 deaths and 370 injuries. Fires can occur when lint builds up in the dryer or in the exhaust duct. Lint can block the flow of air, cause excessive heat build-up, and result in a fire, in some dryers. To help prevent fires:

- Clean the lint screen/filter before or after drying each load of clothes. If clothing is still damp at the end of a typical drying cycle or drying requires longer times than normal, this may be a sign that the lint screen or the exhaust duct is blocked.
- Clean the dryer vent and exhaust duct periodically. Check the outside dryer vent while the dryer is operating to make sure exhaust air is escaping. If it is not, the vent or the exhaust duct may be blocked. To remove a blockage in the exhaust path, it may be necessary to disconnect the exhaust duct from the dryer. Remember to reconnect the ducting to the dryer and outside vent before using the dryer again.
- Clean behind the dryer, where lint can build up. Have a qualified service person clean the interior of the dryer chassis periodically to minimize the amount of lint accumulation. Keep the area around the dryer clean and free of clutter.
- Replace plastic or foil, accordion-type ducting material with rigid or corrugated semi-rigid metal duct. Most manufacturers specify the use of a rigid or corrugated semi-rigid metal duct, which provides maximum airflow. The flexible plastic or foil type duct can more easily trap lint and is more susceptible to kinks or crushing, which can greatly reduce the airflow.
- Take special care when drying clothes that have been soiled with volatile chemicals such as gasoline, cooking oils, cleaning agents, or finishing oils and stains. If possible, wash the clothing more than once to minimize the amount of volatile chemicals on the clothes and, preferably, hang the clothes to dry. If using a dryer, use the lowest heat setting and a drying cycle that has a cool-down period at the end of the cycle. To prevent clothes from igniting after drying, do not leave the dried clothes in the dryer or piled in a laundry basket.

To combat this lurking laundry room danger, it is recommended that homeowners have clothes dryer exhaust ducts inspected and cleaned annually. Most HVAC contractors provide this service.

Clothes dryers have historically either been located in basements or on the main floor of a house and generally within a short distance from an outside wall. Because of these logistics, the danger of lint plugging the exhaust duct has been minimal. But newer homes tend to have dryers located away from an outside wall in bathrooms, kitchens and in hall closets which is convenient, but potentially dangerous from a safety standpoint.

These new locations mean that dryers tend to be vented longer distances and vents are generally installed with more bends to accommodate the extended path they must take through the home. As a result, dryer ducts are harder to access and this additional length creates more places where lint can collect and animals and birds can hide.

Because lint is incredibly flammable it poses a fire risk. The availability of natural gas clothes dryers is another reason why dryer exhaust duct maintenance is necessary. If a gas clothes dryer is not properly vented, it can cause carbon monoxide to be forced back into the home and that can be deadly. In addition to lint obstructions or improper venting, bird's nests or rodents and bug infestations can also plug up a vent causing potential fire hazards or carbon monoxide poisonings. Symptoms of a clogged clothes dryer exhaust duct include incomplete drying of clothes at normal temperatures and very hot dryer temperatures.

It is recommended that clothes dryer exhaust ducts be inspected by a licensed HVAC contractor. When a certified technician inspects a clothes dryer exhaust duct, they check to make sure there are no obstructions and if the installation is correct. They also verify that the correct type of vent is in use. For example, homes with plastic exhaust ducts are generally upgraded to metal exhaust ducts.

## 7 Ways to Make Your House Even Safer

Your home is supposed to be your safe haven, where you go to get away from the rest of the world. But if not properly maintained, that safe haven can become a dangerous nightmare. Here's how to keep your home as safe as it should be.

### *Tips for a Safer Home:*

- **Sweep the chimney.** A buildup of creosote in your chimney can spark a fire. So can improper ventilation, faulty flues, or chimneys that are not up to modern building codes. Remedy the situation with an inspection and a good cleaning by a chimney sweep.
- **Beware the lint.** Dryer lint might seem like a benign thing, but it is actually a highly flammable buildup. Clean out your dryer on a regular basis, and don't let lint accumulate around it.
- **Detect lethal gases.** Appliances that burn fuel have the potential to create carbon monoxide, which can kill you and your family before you realize what's happening. Avoid the problem by using proper exhaust on the appliances, and invest in a carbon monoxide detector to uncover what you can't see or smell.
- **Electricity and water don't mix.** Never place a television, radio, or similar appliance in an area that sees a lot of water use. Be very careful with small appliances traditionally found in bathrooms and kitchens, such as toasters and hair dryers. They might seem too small to kill you, but they can!
- **Keep out the wildlife.** Squirrels, bats, and other wild animals can get into your home through very small gaps, usually between the roof and the structure itself. They can set up shop in your attic, chew through cords, and leave toxic droppings. If you hear the tell-tale scratching and squeaking, it's time to eliminate the problem and close up those holes!

- **Avoid an explosion.** Methane gases can build up in sewer lines, and if they build up in your home, you have a potentially deadly situation on your hands. The simple lighting of a match or pilot light can make methane explode. If you catch a whiff of sewage, check it out immediately.
- **Knock out mold.** If you see mold anywhere in your home, take steps to remedy the cause, and then remove the mold. Letting it linger can lead to breathing problems and illness.

Stay safe in your safe haven. A little bit of prevention can make you and your family much more secure.

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