

Clothes Dryer Fires: How to Prevent Them

Clothes dryers are a leading cause of fires in the home. Are hidden hazards lurking in your home?



The U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission estimates that clothes dryers are associated with more than 15,000 fires each year that result in property damage, injury and in the worst cases, death. Dryers rank third among the appliances in our homes that start fires, with only stoves and fixed heating systems ranking higher. The Leviton Institute cautions that like any household electrical appliance, clothes dryers require periodic inspection to ensure they are working properly. It recommends you have your dryer inspected by a professional who can replace worn parts and clean its interior to prevent the build up of lint and other fibers that can cause a malfunction. To protect your home and family, make sure you operate your dryer with these precautions in mind:

- Never leave the house while your dryer is running -- a malfunction can occur at anytime, often with serious consequences. If the dryer does malfunction, immediately turn it off and disconnect the power cord. Call a qualified repair professional to make the needed repair.
- Dryers should be plugged into outlets equipped to handle the electrical load. Overloaded electrical outlets can result in tripped circuit breakers and blown fuses.
- Make sure your dryer is vented to an outside wall and check to see that its exhaust vent is unobstructed and its outdoor vent flap opens frequently. If air is not being directed through the duct there may be a blockage. In order to remove the blockage from the exhaust path, you may have to disconnect the exhaust duct from the dryer. Be sure to reconnect the vent and the duct before restarting the dryer.
- Keep the area in which your dryer is located free from clutter. Make sure there are no combustible materials such as boxes or clothing near the dryer. Use caution when drying clothing saturated in hazardous chemicals by washing them thoroughly. Then use the lowest heat setting and do not allow contaminated clothing to sit in the dryer or basket with other clothes.
- Remove the lint filter, thoroughly clean it after each use and reinstall it. Never operate the dryer without the filter. Doing so can cause lint, threads, fibers and dust to get entrapped in its internal mechanical parts where they can combust or cause other problems.
- Protect children and pets by keeping the dryer door in the closed position. A curious toddler, or small pet seeking warmth, could crawl inside and become injured or trapped.