

# Home Safety – Hidden Clothes Dryer Fire Hazard

## Check for Highly Flammable Dryer Lint in Entire Duct Vent System

**Clothes dryers cause thousands of fires yearly. Dryer duct vent system cleaning and other fire prevention steps can save lives and lower operating costs, too.**

**By Miche Collins**



Clothes dryer venting systems can be a fire hazard if not properly installed and maintained. What happens? As clothes dry, moist air and lint accumulate inside the duct pipe, exterior exhaust vent and interior areas of the dryer.

Airflow is increasingly restricted as this plaque-like coating builds up in crevices, corners and elsewhere. This can limit or block air to cause overheating. As the heat builds up, clothing and dryer lint, which is highly

combustible, can catch fire and spread quickly.

Clothes dryer maintenance is key. Many homeowners know it is important to clean the dryer lint filter before or after each load. But it is also essential to clear and maintain the hose-like dryer duct vent or metal pipe and exhaust vent, as well as interior and surrounding areas.

### **Clothes Dryer Fires Are Common**

Fire safety experts cite “failure to clean” as the reason for 70% of operational factors contributing to clothes dryer fires. Clothes dryers cause as many as 15,000 fires, 15 deaths and 400 injuries annually, according to the National Fire Data Center.

### **Fire Risk: Restricted Airflow Plus Highly Flammable, Hidden Lint**

As dryer lint builds up and airflow is increasingly restricted, the dryer overheats. It can even generate sparks or fire. Intense heat is enough to ignite clothing fibers and trapped lint. It can burn right through foil or plastic duct vents. It can also ignite nearby dust, lint, clutter, or other combustibles stored in the area.

Many duct vents are made of foil. Some homes still have plastic vents, even though manufacturers now instruct installers not to use a plastic duct vent. Whatever the material, if any

duct is crushed, perforated, or lined with lint, it can trap lint and cause problems.

Since lint is so flammable it doesn't take much to trigger a fire once heat builds up. Keeping airflow free is key. Experts say highly flammable vinyl ducts should never be used. Plastic duct ducts can also present a risk. If a fire starts, they can melt or even add fuel to a fire.

## **How to Diminish the Risk**

To help limit fire hazards, consult a pro when installing a dryer. Stay current with industry safety standards and keep these tips in mind:

- Ideally, the duct should be horizontal and as secure, straight and short as possible. Airflow is more limited in a vertical duct or a lengthy duct with more bends and turns. Have systems like this cleaned and checked more often. Be vigilant about lint-removal. Pros can use a special vacuum to clean hard-to-reach areas, such as a system that runs under the floor.
- Use a metal pipe or duct vent with as few elbow joints or bends as possible. Choose a duct with a smooth interior that is less likely to trap moist lint. Dryer lint accumulates in ridges and bends, as well as creases and crevices inside the duct.
- Never perforate or use sheet screws on ducts or elbow joints as they provide a home for damp lint to accumulate, causing dangerous, plaque-like blocks. Clean and maintain regularly, following special clothes dryer cleaning steps.
- Never sleep or leave home while the dryer is running. Clothes dryers often operate in remote or unattended areas. A small fire can quickly get out of hand before it is discovered.
- Make it a habit to keep the dryer, duct vent or pipe and exhaust vents clean and clear, inside and out. Use a specially designed dryer cleaning kit available at home improvement stores or other retail outlets.

Always follow current industry, building and fire codes, and consult a professional to check existing systems or guide the installation of a new system.

Learn more:

- [Clothes Dryer Duct Cleaning and Tips](#)
- [Clothes Dryer Fire Hazard Warning Signs](#)
- [Clothes Dryer Do's and Don'ts - Safety Checklist](#)
- [US Fire Administration: Fire and Safety Tips](#)

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