

Subject: Preventing Dryer Fires

January 2012

Nationally, more than 15,600 fires occur every year because of clothes dryers; dryers are also one of the leading causes of fire in OPWDD-certified homes. Common causes for dryer fires include unclean lint collection units and unsafe ventilation systems. As with all health and safety alerts, we ask everyone to remain diligent and be aware of hazards that need correction—nearly all of the fires caused by clothes dryers can be prevented.

Do not Attempt to Make Dryers Do More than They Can

- Avoid over drying items, and do not use the dryer for anything other than for what it is designed.
- Drying certain items in clothes dryers, such as materials with oil residue, can cause a fire because they may spontaneously combust (start to burn all by themselves) if the conditions are right.

Make Sure Ventilation Systems are Safe

- Dryer exhaust vents in all OPWDD-certified programs should vent directly to the outside of the building.
- Dryer vents cannot be longer than the equivalent of 25 feet. When lint has to pass through an exhaust vent that is under a floor or through walls and is more than six feet long, it is almost impossible to propel all of the lint out of the vent. As a result, lint can accumulate in pockets along the vent, where it is harder to reach and clean. It is critical to regularly inspect and clean out the dryer vent.
- The dryer exhaust vent should be cleaned and inspected at least quarterly to remove any lint that is blocking air flow (more frequently in dryers that are heavily used).
- The use of plastic or foil flexible dryer ducts between the vent and the clothes dryer is prohibited. Most dryer manufacturers now require or recommend solid metal transitional ducts. Please refer to the manufacturer's installation instructions for guidance on how to properly vent your dryer.

Clean Out the Lint

- Because accumulated lint can—and does—catch fire, remove and clean the lint screen after each load.
- Be aware that if clothing requires more time than usual to dry, the exhaust vent or lint screen may be blocked and should be checked immediately.
- Do not overload the dryer with excessive clothing. This causes lint to block the vent, which delays clothes drying and can cause the dryer to overheat.

Clothes Dryers are NOT Meant to Dry Everything. Do Not Dry:

- Any item containing plastic, foam rubber, or rubber-like materials.
- Any item that has had anything flammable on it, even though it has been washed.
- Any item that has ever had any type of oil on it, including cooking oil.
- Fabric softener sheets that do not state specifically that they are safe for dryer use.
- Garments cleaned with dry cleaning fluid.

Additionally, keep all flammable materials away from dryers, furnaces or other heat sources, including clothing, flammable cleaning supplies, and dry cleaning supplies. Do not run a dryer when no one is home. Remain nearby and vigilant while a dryer is operating. For additional information, please call your DDSO's fire safety representative or the OPWDD Office of Safety and Security Services at 518-474-9897.