FIRE SAFETY TIPS "CLOTHES DRYERS"

If you are like most people, you probably don't give much thought to starting the clothes dryer for a load of laundry before leaving your home. After all, modern washers and dryers are reliable appliances—so, how could anything go wrong?

The members of the Lake Monticello Fire Department would like to caution you that many things can go wrong by leaving your clothes dryer running unsupervised. Any heat-generating appliance should never be left unattended. If something should go wrong, or the appliance fails, early detection is paramount to avoid a disaster. If you were at home, you would be likely to notice a sign of a malfunction with your clothes dryer. It might emit a distinct smell, smoke, or a noise, which would prompt you to turn off your dryer quickly and contact the fire department, if necessary. However, if left unattended, any malfunction or failure can lead to smoke and fire which can progress unabated.

Remember, a fire will double in size every minute, so early detection is paramount.

There are numerous factors that can cause your clothes dryer to fail or experience a mechanical malfunction which can start a fire which would be catastrophic, especially if no one is home to discover the emergency. Items which can fail, overheat, or catch fire are:

- Lint traps and accumulated lint in the dryer itself and the duct work
- Clogged or obstructed vent ducts
- Clothes drums, pullies, belts, and bearings
- Heat element
- Felt seals
- Motor
- Blower fan
- Control panel
- Clothing separated from the drum due to a failure and igniting from flame impingement from the heating element
- Vinyl vent piping. It is recommended to use aluminum rigid or semi-rigid metal ductwork

Wasted Electricity

If the clothes dryer doesn't shut off due to a failure, it could potentially run for hours, wasting energy and cause you electric bill to rise.

Water Damage Risk

Some modern-day clothes dryers have a water inlet which provides a water supply for the steam function to reduce wrinkles, neutralize odors, and minimize static cling in clothes. These components are also subject to failure and malfunction. A broken water hose can cause enormous damage to your home, especially when the leak is undetected.

For this reason, the Lake Monticello Fire Department recommends the use of stainless steel-braided hose connections. Steel braided water hoses are highly reliable, durable products with a long lifespan, often lasting 10-20 years or more, and are resistant to leaks, kinks, and ruptures, making them a significant upgrade from standard rubber hoses, which can degrade over time.

Overheating and Electrical Malfunctions

Clothes dryers use high heat alongside strong electrical currents. Faulty wiring, worn-out parts, or blocked vents often cause overheating, sparks, or even electrical fires. Overheating can also occur when airflow is weak. It is important to have an operational smoke detector installed in the area of the laundry room.

Fire Risk From Lint Buildup

Lint is fuel and is highly flammable. If it accumulates in the lint trap, exhaust vent, or around the heating element, it can ignite from the heat of the dryer. If the vent or lint screen becomes clogged, the heater could potentially run too hot, causing the lint to ignite. Lint can ignite at temperatures of 390 degrees or lower.

Carbon Monoxide Risks

Gas dryers bring an additional safety risk. If the exhaust vent is blocked or loose, carbon monoxide exhaust fumes can leak into the interior of your home. Carbon monoxide is an odorless and colorless gas and cannot be detected without a carbon monoxide detector.

Tips for Safe Dryer Use

According to FEMA, clothes dryers are one of the leading causes of house fires in North America, and many of these incidents occur when no one is home. The Lake Monticello Fire Department has responded to many incidents involving clothes dryers through the years.

The following tips will help you keep your house and family safe from dryer disasters.

- **Clean the lint trap before every load.** Make sure to remove lint from the screen after each drying cycle.
- **Maintain the dryer vent and ductwork.** Lint can build up in places you cannot see, restricting airflow and creating a fire hazard. By cleaning out the dryer vent and ductwork you will clear out any blockages and reduce the risk of overheating. You can do this yourself once or twice a year or you can hire a professional. If you are a "Do-It-Yourself" person like me, you can accomplish this task fairly easily.
- **Do not overload the dryer.** Too many clothes in the dryer make the motor and heating element work harder, increasing the risk of overheating. Use separate loads to dry heavier items.
- **Inspect electrical cords and connections.** Inspect your electrical cords and connections often to be sure cords are not frayed, bent, or trapped under heavy appliances. A faulty connection can spark or overheat.
- **Give the dryer a few inches of space.** When installing your dryer, make sure there is space behind it for all of the components to function without restriction and so you can visually inspect it.
- **Schedule professional maintenance.** Have a technician inspect your dryer and vent system every year, especially in the case of gas dryers.

Every day members of the Lake Monticello Volunteer Fire Department gladly strive to protect and serve all our neighbors. If these fire safety tips can help us convey our important messages to you then we feel satisfied with our community protection mission.

Always remember, in an emergency dial 911 and Do Not Call the Main Gate.

Richard J. Constantino
Fire Chief