



**State of West Virginia
Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety**

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Clothes Dryer Safety

Most of us do laundry on a daily basis. But how many of us think about the potential fire hazards involved when a clothes dryer isn't used properly? "We tend to take our home appliances for granted," said Sterling Lewis, Jr., West Virginia State Fire Marshal. "But that can be a very dangerous attitude when you look at the number of dryer fires occurring each year in this country."

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), from 2003-2006, there were on average over 15,300 home structure fires per year where clothes dryers or washing machines were the equipment involved in ignition, with annual losses of 16 civilian deaths, 433 injuries, and \$201 million in direct property damage. ***Dryers alone accounted for 92% of these fires and all of the reported deaths.***

The items first ignited tended to be clothing, dust/fiber/lint, wire or cable insulation and appliance housing or casing. The risk of fire is slightly higher for gas-fueled clothes dryers than for electric powered—but the dangers of either are still significant!

The leading cause (29%) of home clothes dryer fires (and washer fires) is failure to clean them!

The West Virginia State Fire Marshal's Office offers the following safety tips from the NFPA to help you prevent a clothes dryer fire:

- Have your dryer installed and serviced by a professional.
- Do not use the dryer without a lint filter.
- Make sure you clean the lint filter before or after each load of laundry. Remove lint that has collected around the drum.
- Rigid or flexible metal venting material should be used to sustain proper air flow and drying time.
- Make sure the air exhaust vent pipe is not restricted and the outdoor vent flap will open when the dryer is on. Once a year, or more often if you notice that it's taking longer than normal for your clothes to dry, clean lint out of the vent pipe.
- Keep dryers in good working order. Gas dryers should be inspected by a professional to make sure that the gas line and connection are intact and free of leaks.
- Make sure the right plug and outlet are used and that the machine is connected properly.
- Follow the manufacturer's operating instructions and don't overload your dryer.
- Turn the dryer off if you leave home or when you go to bed.
- Make sure your dryer is properly grounded.
- Check the outdoor vent flap to make sure it's not covered or blocked by objects such as outdoor furniture, birds' nests, etc.
- Keep the area around your dryer clear of things that can burn like boxes, cleaning supplies, clothing, etc.
- Clothes that have come in contact with flammable substances like gasoline, paint thinner, or similar solvents should be laid outside to dry, then can be washed and dried as usual.
- **For more information on home fire safety, visit the following websites:**

www.nfpa.org www.homesafetycouncil.org www.usfa.dhs.gov