

Source: *The Palm Beach Post* (Monday, December 31, 2001)

Jupiter man's invention hits some Home Depots

Rick Harpenau says his Dryerbox helps make homes safer and saves space.



JUPITER — Two years ago, Rick Harpenau quit his job building jails for Wackenhut Corp. to work full time on an obscure invention called The Dryerbox, a metal receptacle that promises to save space and reduce the risk of fire.

Two weeks ago, that invention became less obscure, when Home Depot started selling The Dryerbox for \$19.95 at eight stores in Austin, Texas.

Harpenau, 44, came up with the idea more than five years ago, while he was the owner of Marlin Construction, a general contracting company that built the Palm Harbor housing development in Palm Beach Gardens.

The Dryerbox is the same size as a medicine cabinet and is installed behind a home's clothes dryer to hold the exhaust hose. Without it, Harpenau says, the hose coils on the floor, collecting lint, posing a fire hazard, and needlessly taking up 6 inches of space that, over time, fills with fallen

socks and underwear.

"It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out this is a great improvement," said Harpenau, who lives in Jupiter with his wife, Kerry, and 11-year-old son, Ryan. "It's an easy sell."

Harpenau has a Web site, www.dryerbox.com, and markets mostly to builders, architects and homeowners. Using a manufacturer in Pittsburgh, he says he's sold more than 100,000 units so far and hopes to put it on shelves in Home Depot stores nationwide.

The Home Depot pilot, as he calls it, came after three years of letter writing and phone calls.

Where does he get his can-do spirit? He grew up in Cincinnati as one of eight kids. "When you have a family that big, there's always something that breaks," he said. "I was the handyman."

- Amy Martinez