

A firefighter hoses down the charred remains of a clothes dryer and washing machine from a home, where lint buildup in the dryer caused a fire.



Dryer Fire Wipes Out Family Belongings

By Wanda M. Walters,
NAS Sigonella, Sicily

A wife (my former neighbor) started a clothes dryer in the laundry room, which was located between the garage and kitchen. She then left the house to run errands. The outside temperature that day was in the 80s. A buildup of lint caused the dryer to overheat, starting a fire that caused more than \$300,000 in damages.

Pool chemicals stored in an open cabinet in the laundry room contributed to this fire. It seems the husband thought the laundry room would provide safer storage for the chemicals than the garage because the former was air-conditioned. He didn't mind that gasoline and numerous other chemicals for the yard, cars and lawn equipment were stored in the garage.

Because of the poor storage of hazardous material and the excessive dryer lint, the only thing left of my neighbors' personal property after the fire was their pool.

Here are some things you can do to avoid the dryer problems my neighbors had:

- Clean the lint filter after each load of clothes, and make sure the dryer is working. While it's running, check the outside exhaust hose to make sure air is escaping normally. If it's not, turn off the dryer and look inside both ends of the duct for lint blockage; remove any that you find. If the dryer seems hotter than usual, its temperature-control thermostat probably needs servicing.
- If clothing still is damp at the end of a normal

cycle, it may be a signal that the exhaust duct or lining screen is blocked.

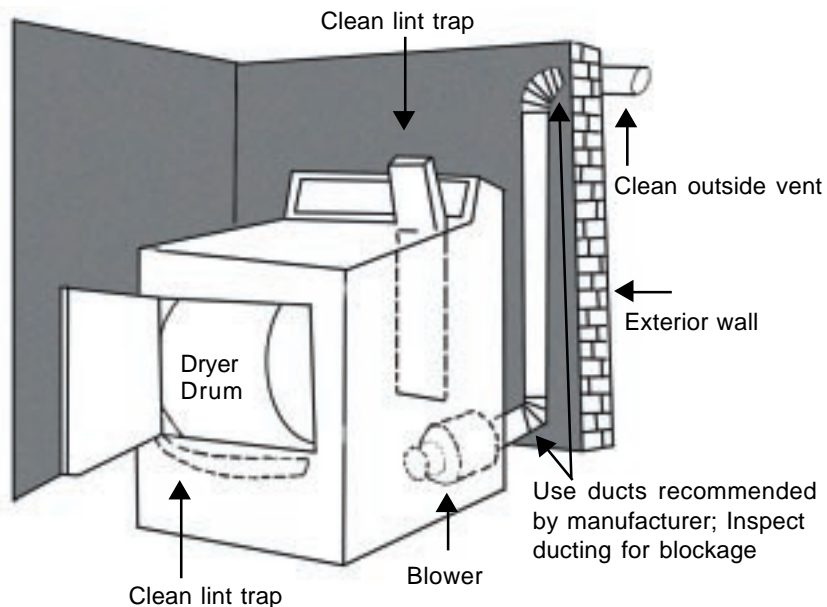
- Check the exhaust duct often if the one you have is a plastic, flexible model. This type is more apt to trap lint than one without ridges. Inspect the duct for kinks or crushing, which can reduce the airflow (*see accompanying drawing*).

- Closely follow the manufacturer's instructions for new installations. Most manufacturers specify using a rigid or flexible metal duct for the least restriction of airflow. If a metal duct is not available where you purchase a dryer, check other locations, such as hardware or building-supply stores. If you're having someone install a dryer, insist on a metal duct, unless the installer verifies that the manufacturer permits the use of a plastic type.

You also should follow these practices for storing hazardous materials:

- Store pool chemicals in a cool place, detached from other buildings. Never store them inside a garage or house or where they're exposed to heat or sunlight.

- When storing hazardous materials at home, use the same system you use at work (e.g., separate acids from bases and flammables from combustibles). Make sure lids are secured and labeling is legible, especially if children or pets are in the home. Also, keep copies of Material Safety Data Sheets, which should have been given to you at the time of purchase. Keep the phone number for the local



poison-control office near the telephone and in your storage areas.

- Never store gasoline or other flammables in a garage. Buy only the amount you need for one-time use. Always store paint and other flammable liquids in their original, labeled containers, with tightly fitting lids. Use and store all flammables far away from

appliances, heaters, pilot lights, and other sources of heat or flame. Never smoke near flammable liquids. Remove trash from your home.

- Let equipment containing flammables cool down after use, before storing it in an enclosed area.

The key to avoiding problems like my neighbors encountered is to have regular maintenance done on your dryer, furnace and air-conditioning units. ❏

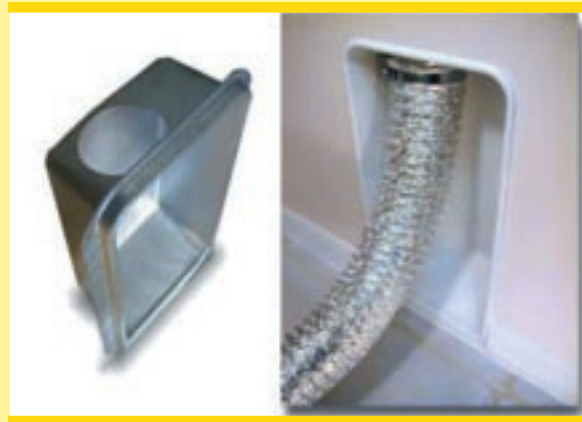
Dryer fires are also a problem in Navy and Marine Corps facilities. According to the Naval Safety Center database, 241 cases were reported between Jan. 1, 1990, and March 14, 2001. The total damage from these fires amounted to more than \$387,000.

Solving the Problem of Lint Buildup

As Paul Harvey would say, “And now for the rest of the story.” If your dryer has a flexible exhaust hose, there’s a device available to relieve some of your worry about lint buildup. The Dryerbox (*see accompanying photo*), is a recessed, dryer-vent box that allows you to install a dryer against the wall without fear of creating a fire hazard. It also allows a dryer to work more efficiently.

The 22-gauge, aluminized-steel box installs between 12-or-16-inch-on-center studs, and you can exhaust it to a roof jack, sidewall or down to a crawl space or floor-joint system.

Clothes dryers encourage evaporation through heat, tumbling and efficient air exchanging. The Dryerbox appears to have the potential to save a typical household about \$60 in energy costs over 10 years. In a company-run investigation, an identical load was exhausted through an obstructed hose and an unobstructed hose. The load took 11 percent



longer to achieve the same final weight through the obstructed hose as it did with the unobstructed hose.

The Dryerbox is available from distributors and wholesale outlets throughout the country. You also can get it from direct sales via the internet. For more information, call (888) 44DRYER (443-7937), e-mail info@dryerbox.com, or visit www.dryerbox.com on the web. ❏