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Product Safety Tips:

Clean those lint traps: UL promotes clothes dryer safety

For many consumers, the clothes dryer has become an appliance of both convenience and necessity.

Did you know that?

- Clothes dryers can be found in 80 percent, or 81.5 million homes throughout the United States.
- A full load of wet clothes placed in a dryer contains about one half gallon of water. As water is removed, lint is created from the clothes.
- Clothes dryers are one of the most expensive appliances in your home to operate. The longer it runs, the more money it costs you.
- The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimates that 15,500 fires associated with clothes dryers occur annually. These fires account for an average of 10 deaths and 310 injuries and more than \$84.4 million in property damage annually.
- On a positive note, the number of clothes dryer fires has dropped by 35% from the 24,000 fires that occurred annually, on average, in the late 1970s.

Possible causes of fires

What causes some clothes dryer fires? Lack of maintenance is a contributing factor. People just aren't cleaning lint traps as often as they should nor are they checking and cleaning vent systems on a periodic basis. Reduced airflow resulting from lint buildup in the screen or other areas around the dryer can cause the dryer to perform poorly, operate at elevated temperatures and possibly overheat.

Problems can also occur if consumers place improper items in their dryers, such as foam backed rugs or athletic shoes, or vent their appliances with plastic, vinyl or aluminum foil exhaust materials.

A simple solution

To achieve optimal airflow and reduce lint buildup, an all-metal dryer vent or duct is recommended. Rigid or flexible metal venting and ducting materials help sustain airflow, as well as reduce operating costs and extend the life of the dryer and clothing due to lower drying temperatures.

Additional dryer dos and don'ts

- Clean the lint filter before or after each load. Don't forget to clean the back of the dryer where lint can be trapped.

- The interior of the dryer and venting system should be cleaned periodically by qualified service personnel. If you notice the drying time is longer, clean the vent system thoroughly to ensure proper airflow.
- Replace plastic, vinyl and aluminum foil venting with rigid or flexible metal venting.
- Do not dry clothing/fabric on which there is anything flammable (alcohol, cooking oils, gasoline, spot removers, dry-cleaning solvents, etc.). Flammable substances give off vapors that could ignite or explode.
- Don't forget to read manufacturers' warnings in use and care manuals that accompany new dryers. Also, warning markings can usually be found on the inside of the dryer's lid and take only minutes to read.

How UL has helped reduce dryer fire risks

UL has worked with the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers (AHAM) and the CPSC to reduce the number of clothes dryer fires. Changes have been made to UL's Standard for electric clothes dryers including installation instructions specifying using only metal exhaust duct materials; user instructions that lint be cleaned regularly from areas around the dryer and lint screen; routing wiring and keeping other electrical components away from heat-producing devices; and abnormal operations tests that simulate a blocked lint screen and exhaust at 25, 75 and 100 percent blockage.

