

# ORANGE COUNTY FIRE AUTHORITY

## *Fire Safety Article*



**From The Office Of Fire Chief Chip Prather  
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### **DRYER FIRES**

Thousands of fires are started each year by clothes dryers. These fires can occur when lint builds up in the dryer or in the exhaust duct. The build-up of lint can block the flow of air, cause excessive heat build-up, and result in a fire.

Clothes dryers must vent hot air from the dryer to the outside of the house. Lint becomes detached from the clothes and is carried out through the exhaust. If lint builds up in the exhaust pipe or inside the dryer, it slows the air movement through the dryer and out the exhaust. The slower air movement causes more lint to collect on the backside of the dryer drum, on the dryer motor, or on the electrical connections inside the dryer, placing the highly combustible lint on top of and adjacent to heat sources inside the dryer.

Following are some tips to help prevent dryer fires:

- Do not operate the dryer without a lint filter.
- Clean the lint filters before or after each use and remove accumulated lint from around the drum.
- Make sure that the dryer is plugged into an outlet suitable for its electrical needs, as overloaded electrical outlets can result in blown fuses or tripped circuit breakers.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions for installing the dryer and for maintaining minimum clearances.
- Turn the dryer off when leaving your home and keep the dryer area clear of combustibles.
- Dryers should be installed and serviced by a professional.
- Have gas-powered dryers regularly inspected by a professional to ensure that the gas line and connections are intact.
- Take special care when drying clothes that have been soiled with volatile chemicals such as gasoline, cooking oils, cleaning agents, or finishing oils and stains. If possible, wash the clothing more than once to minimize the amount of chemicals on the clothes.
- Clean behind the dryer, where lint can build up. Have a qualified service person clean the interior of the dryer chassis periodically to minimize the amount of lint accumulation. Keep the area around the dryer clean and free of clutter.

*To obtain a flyer on Dryer Fires with additional information, please call the OCFA Community Relations and Education Section at (714) 573-6200 or visit OCFA's website at [www.ocfa.org/safety&education](http://www.ocfa.org/safety&education)*



# Dryer Safety

[www.ocfa.org](http://www.ocfa.org)

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that in 1998, clothes dryers were associated with 15,600 fires, which resulted in 20 deaths and 370 injuries. Fires can occur when lint builds up in the dryer or in the exhaust duct. The build-up of lint can block the flow of air, cause excessive heat build-up, and result in a fire in some dryers.



## What Causes Dryer Fires?

Clothes dryers must vent hot air from the dryer to the outside of the house. Lint becomes detached from the clothes and is carried out through the exhaust. If lint builds up in the exhaust pipe or inside the dryer, it slows the air movement through the dryer and out the exhaust. The slower air movement causes more lint to collect on the backside of the dryer drum, on the dryer motor, or on the electrical connections inside the dryer, placing the highly combustible lint on top of and adjacent to heat sources inside the dryer.

## Dryer Safety Tips:

- Do not operate the dryer without a lint filter.
- Clean the lint filters before or after each use and remove accumulated lint from around the drum.
- Make sure that the dryer is plugged into an outlet suitable for its electrical needs, as overloaded electrical outlets can result in blown fuses or tripped circuit breakers.
- Turn the dryer off when leaving the home.
- Keep the dryer area clear of combustibles.
- Have gas-powered dryers regularly inspected by a professional to ensure that the gas line and connections are intact.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions for installing the dryer and for maintaining minimum clearances.

## Orange County Dryer Fire Statistics

Year	Total Fires	Dollar Loss
2000	18	\$180,900
2001	17	\$107,450
2002	22	\$225,050
2003	15	\$124,050
2004	17	\$74,125
2005	19	\$843,725

## To Help Prevent Fires:

- **Clean the lint screen/filter** before or after drying each load of clothes.
- **If clothing is still damp at the end of a typical drying cycle** or drying requires longer times than normal, this may be a sign that the lint screen or the exhaust duct is blocked.
- **Clean the dryer vent and exhaust duct periodically.** Check the outside dryer vent while the dryer is operating to make sure exhaust air is escaping. To remove a blockage in the exhaust path, it may be necessary to disconnect the exhaust duct from the dryer. Remember to reconnect the ducting to the dryer and outside vent before using the dryer again.
- **Clean behind the dryer, where lint can build up.** Have a qualified service person clean the interior of the dryer chassis periodically to minimize the amount of lint accumulation. Keep the area around the dryer clean and free of clutter.
- **Replace plastic or foil, accordion-type ducting material with rigid or corrugated semi-rigid metal duct.** Most manufacturers specify the use of a rigid or corrugated semi-rigid metal duct, which provides maximum airflow.
- **Take special care when drying clothes that have been soiled with volatile chemicals** such as gasoline, cooking oils, cleaning agents, or finishing oils and stains. If possible, wash the clothing more than once to minimize the amount of volatile chemicals on the clothes and, preferably, hang the clothes to dry. If using a dryer, use the lowest heat setting and a drying cycle that has a cool-down period.



## For More Information

[www.ocfa.org](http://www.ocfa.org)  
[www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org)  
[www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov)  
[www.consumeraffairs.com](http://www.consumeraffairs.com)  
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