

Cleaning out clothes dryer duct improves efficiency, safety

BY JAMES AND MORRIS CAREY
FOR AP WEEKLY FEATURES

We recently bought an electric clothes dryer. When it stopped drying properly after less than a year, we were surprised.

The first thing we checked was the 220-volt power outlet. A dryer can fool you; even though the drum is turning it might not be getting enough power to properly dry a load of clothes.

A dryer powered by 220 volts uses only 110 volts (half the circuit) to rotate the drum. However, it uses 220 volts (all of the circuit) to fire up the heating coils. So, just because the drum is turning and the light inside comes on, it doesn't mean that it is performing as designed.

Much to our surprise – and disappointment – the circuit indicated that 220 volts were available and making their way into the machine.

The next task was to pull the dryer out and check the exhaust system and the wall ducting. We were amazed at what we found. We had a fire-trap on our hands. The system

was completely clogged with lint. It was as if someone had stuffed tons of lint into the exhaust duct with a cannon ram. The lint was so tightly packed that we had to chisel it out.

As an added safety measure, we thought it would be a good idea to hire a company to clean all the ducts in our home at once.

We don't own the special vacuuming equipment needed to clean heating ducts.

Because we wanted to kill as many birds with one stone as possible, we decided on a whole-house duct cleaning. After writing a check for several hundred dollars, we were certain our dryer would do a load in record time.

When the load was ready we checked it into the dryer. We could have heard a pin drop an hour later when the dryer shut off automatically and we opened it to find a wet load.

FINDING THE PROBLEM

What could it possibly be? The power was all right. The dryer was getting hot and the ducting in the dryer and the

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wall had been professionally cleaned. It was time to call in an appliance repairman.

The dryer seemed to be running really warm, but everything inside was hot and wet after an hour of tumbling on high.

Here's what happened.

No one had thought to check the dryer-duct outlet on the roof. In this case the dryer outlet exhausted through the roof. Up the ladder we went. In the face: a clogged weather cap. Lint was compacted so tightly that we had to pull it out a little at a time with needle-nose pliers.

It took nearly a half-hour to get it clean.

There is a moral to our story: When you clean your ducting, be sure to check both ends.

We have decided to clean our own dryer duct from now on.

Apparently some of the people who do it for a living have trouble counting to two – the number of ends in a duct.

YOUR OWN SYSTEM

If you can count to two, you will enjoy creating your own duct-vacuuming system that can be used to ensure that your dryer is operating safely while operating at peak energy efficiency.

Even a partially clogged dryer duct is a fire hazard at best, and definitely reduces the appliance's energy-efficiency operation.

First, you will need a short length of garden hose and a plastic cap from a spray can. The cap and hose are connect-

ed to create a slender and flexible vacuum cleaner adaptor. One end of the hose is cleanly sliced at a 45-degree angle (making it easier to feed around tight corners).

The other end of the hose is fed through a hole in the plastic cap that allows the smaller hose to connect to the larger one on your vacuum.

A tiny bit of duct tape is used to attach the plastic cap to the hose.

Suction from your vacuum cleaner should hold the apparatus in place during cleaning. If not, duct-tape it.

Vacuuming the inside of your dryer will take less than 5 minutes and will immediately improve operating conditions when lint is removed.

The same holds true for the duct in the wall.

By the way, it's a good idea to check your dryer duct.

Optimum conditions can often be achieved without a lot of hassle. Here's what to check for and some ways to improve things:

Replace flexible ducting with the rigid kind.

The flexible plastic type is

especially bad.

Make connections with metal tape – not screws. For extra strength, strap ducting to the framing – especially near duct connections.

Use the fewest possible 90-degree elbows in the line. Each elbow reduces free flow.

Insulate your dryer duct where it passes through unheated areas (crawl space and attic).

This reduces condensation inside the ducting.

Wet lint is kind of like plaster of Paris.

For more home improvement tips and information, visit our Web site at www.onthehouse.com.

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Get a move on moving furniture

One of the fastest ways to give a room a makeover, apart from painting or wallpapering, is to rearrange furniture.

By simply switching around your sofa, loveseat and entertainment center, you'll find the room can take on a completely new look.

However, unless your family comes fully equipped with several moving professionals, moving furniture can be a back-breaking job.

So how to do your revamp your room without ending up in the chiropractor's office? Here are some ways to achieve success without the pain.

■ Sketch it out. Professional decorators often make quick outline sketches of their ideas on paper.

They also do some of their work on graph paper, which makes it easy to map out the square footage of a room and then compare it in relation to

the squares of the graph paper. Each square on the paper represents 1 foot. For example, a 2-by-2-foot overstuffed chair on the graph paper would be two blocks wide by two blocks high. Label the shapes for what item of furniture or decorative item (like a rug) each is representing.

■ Go high-tech. Browse through the software aisle of your local computer store or office supply store and you should find several programs geared toward interior and exterior design.

With these programs, you enter in the measurements of your room and furniture, and then you can move around each item on the screen until you're happy with the placement.

Some of these programs also offer a 3-D virtual walk-through tour, where you can get a "human-eye view" of what the room looks like.

■ Comparison shop. If you live in a housing development, which are popular in suburban America, many of the houses in the development are the same model.

See what your neighbors have done with the room you're looking to change, so you can get an idea of what works and what doesn't.

■ Smooth sailing. If you're a hands-on type of person and believe moving around the actual furniture is the only way to get an accurate view of your new design plan, invest in tools that will make the job easier.

New "as seen on TV" disks that are coated with ultra-slippery silicone can be placed under your furniture legs, making it easy to slide around cumbersome items.

Plus, the disks won't snag on your carpet, preventing further headaches.

Agriscience/Floral Program selling plants

The Agriscience/Floral Program of Oakland Schools Technical Campus Southwest is taking orders for poinsettias, wreaths, roping, holiday cactus and hanging baskets.

Plant prices range from \$5 (for holiday cactus or poinsettias in a 4-inch pot), to \$40 (for a poinsettia tree in a 10-inch pot).

Wreaths come in three sizes,

ranging in price from \$8 to \$20 (undecorated) and \$10 to \$30 (decorated).

Special order, undecorated wreaths in extra-large sizes (4 and 6 feet) are \$40 and \$55.

Roping is \$40 for 50 feet. Grave blankets also available.

Call (248) 960-5442 or (248) 960-5400 for complete offerings and prices and more information.

The program's holiday selection (including permanent wreaths, garlands, candle rings, centerpieces, wall designs, ornaments and topiaries) can be seen at the campus, 1000 Beck Road in Wixom.

Holiday hours are 8-10 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Tuesday-Friday.



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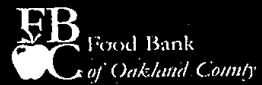
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wish I might,
have this
wish of food
tonight.

This season is magical in the hearts and minds of many. But for those who are hungry it is just another time to worry about how to put food on the table. Please take a moment to think about those who must go without and give to the Food Bank of Oakland County to make their season a little brighter.

Yes, I would like to help the hungry in our community this holiday season. Here is my tax-deductible contribution to the Food Bank of Oakland County.

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