Dryer vents –critical to the safe operation of your clothes dryer

By Rick Bunzel
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A dryer vent can be hazardous to people. It seems odd that something so simple could be the cause of deterioration I find in homes I inspect. Take a look behind your dryer at the exhaust vent. Is it corrugated? Is it plastic? If it's either, or both, you're looking at a potential problem that needs remedying. The problems are: corrugation slows the airflow from the dryer, and plastic vents can be a fire hazard. Over time, corrugated vents tend to accumulate lint, which compounds the slowed airflow and, worse yet, can start fires in some systems, especially those with plastic vents. The anti-static sheets exacerbate the problem as they make the lint sticky clogging up the pipe and vent screen. Thus, you need to dismantle the corrugated tubing and vacuum it out every season or so, which is a time-consuming process that no one ever thinks about.

Another common mistakes made by homeowners is failing to vent their dryer to the exterior. A load of wet clothes can have up to 2.5 gallons of water in it. While it is true that the dryer exhaust will heats up the interior of the home, it adds moisture to the air, which causes mildew, mold and fungi growth, and dry rot of the framing members in the laundry room area walls, floors, and ceilings. Another issue with internal venting is the amount of dust and lint a dryer puts out. The dust and lint will travel throughout the home coating everything and for those who are allergic to dust, it will add to their suffering. Finally, while the heat and humidity may be welcome in the winter, in the summer that’s the last thing you want going into your home!

I have seen homeowners vent a dryer into a crawl space or attic. The added moisture in these locations can cause mold and rot the roof sheathing or flooring. The lint doesn't help as it provides a food source for the mold spores and perfect nesting material for a variety of vermin. If the space is insulated, the moisture ruins the insulation’s effectiveness.

When looking at the placement of a dryer vent it should never be close to the fresh air intake of a high efficiency furnace or water heater. The air being drawn in is for combustion, and the combustion chambers of these units are very sensitive to chemicals. The lint can also cause problems for your air conditioning unit, quickly plugging up the cooling coils and reducing the efficiency of the unit

Most manufacturers specify the use of a rigid or corrugated semi-rigid metal duct, which provides maximum airflow. The flexible plastic or foil type duct can more easily trap lint and is more susceptible to kinks or crushing, which can greatly reduce the airflow.

To keep your dryer running efficiently and avoid danger:

- Clean lint filter with every load.

- Replace white plastic vent hose with metallic vent pipe.
- Buy packaged duct only with UL listing.
- Connect duct with solid metal elbows at the dryer and vent cap.
- If you already have a metal vent, clean it out at least once a year.
- Clean lint from vent where it exits the wall.
- Be sure outside flap opens when dryer is running.

Rick Bunzel is the Principle Inspector at Pacific Crest Inspections. If you would like to know more about your home go to **http://www.paccrestinspections.com/** If you have questions or comments, Rick Bunzel can be contacted at Pacific Crest Inspections @ 360-588-6956