

Case Study

Dryer Fire at Multi-Family Home in Chicago



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Many homeowners and renters may not realize a hidden danger behind their walls: The potential for dryer fires caused by lint buildup. For Patrick B. of Chicago, that risk revealed itself in dramatic fashion.

Patrick was drying a load of clothes in his apartment, a 19th century walk-up, when he smelled something burning. When he opened the door to the laundry closet, he heard crackling and saw flames behind the dryer. He quickly switched the dryer off and was able to extinguish the flames. Had he not been home or had he not noticed the fire early enough, the incident could have become catastrophic for him, his pets, and the other residents of the building.

An investigation by the fire department and by Patrick himself quickly revealed the culprit: Extreme lint buildup. The vent pipe from the dryer was so clogged that he couldn't fit his fist through it, and the buildup had backed up into the dryer itself, caking the motor and drum in a quarter-inch of lint. All told, it took Patrick three hours to finish removing all of the lint from the appliance after an initial cleaning by an appliance professional.

For Patrick and his fiancée, the incident was a powerful warning about the potential for dryer fires

if proper maintenance is not performed, which in this case should have been conducted by his landlord, and proper equipment is not installed. Many renters and homeowners don't realize that simply emptying lint filters isn't enough; lint will still get past the filter and over time will build up in the ductwork and the machine itself.

"It's life and death," Patrick notes about his experience. "Literally. If that catches fire, the entire building is going up. And it's not just you, there's 14 people who could potentially perish."

Along with maintenance, Patrick also learned about dryer exhaust fans, such as Fantech's Dryer Exhaust Duct Power Ventilator, which provides a boost to keep lint entrained in the flow of air during its journey to the outside, thereby minimizing the risk of fire due to lint buildup. The duct power ventilator also continues to operate for a short period of time after the dryer stops, which cools the clothes.

The incident impacted Patrick's future housing decision. He said he plans to have a dryer fan installed, along with a secondary lint trap, when he buys a home. And if he rents again, he plans to speak to the landlord about how often ducts are cleaned.

"Be proactive. Don't take it for granted and assume people are following the rules," Patrick cautions. "Have a maintenance person come out, a professional outside of property management, and inquire about the possibility of additional mechanical exhaust."

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