

How to Clean Dryer Vents and What Can Happen If You Don't

If your dryer takes forever and a day to dry, it might be time to learn how to clean the dryer vent. Ask yourself, honestly, when was the last time you did it. Maybe never? We're not talking about the screen inside the dryer. We're talking about the silver tube exhaust system that carries all the hot, wet air outside.

Your dryer's exhaust system can get clogged with lint, which will keep your dryer from functioning properly. As a result, the dryer will not only take longer to dry clothes, it will also increase your electric bill and create a fire hazard. It's a lose-lose-lose proposition. According to the U.S. Fire Administration, there are about 2,900 dryer fires a year, which cause an estimated five deaths, 100 injuries and \$35 million in property loss. The leading cause of those fires? **Failure to clean dryer vents.**

If that doesn't get you running to clean your dryer, we don't know what will.

Here are the steps, plus pictures, on how to clean dryer vents

Tools you'll need:

- Screwdriver or nut driver
- Dryer vent brushes
- Vacuum cleaner with hose

Step 1: Unplug your dryer

Pull your dryer out a foot or two away from the wall for easier access, and unplug it. **If your dryer runs on gas**, turn off the gas and carefully disconnect it. This is extremely important for your safety.

Step 2: Disconnect the vent and clean the area around it

On the back of your dryer, there is a clamp attached to the vent. Undo the clamp with a screwdriver or nut driver and slide the vent off.

Remove the vent from the back of the dryer.

Carefully reach into the opening in the back of the dryer and clear out the lint. You might want to use a vacuum hose to extract the debris.



Dryer vents can get clogged with lint, which could keep your dryer from functioning properly.

Step 3: Clean the vent from inside the building

The dirtiest parts of the dryer vent are a foot or two on each end. We recommend using a dryer vent brush to clean inside the vent and remove built-up lint.



Clean as far down as possible. To clean even deeper, use a brush with a long, flexible handle (up to 10 feet long). Work the brush up inside as far as you can go. The brush will latch onto the lint and drag it out of the vent pipes.

After that, you can insert the attachment hose of a vacuum cleaner into the vent to pull out any remaining dust and lint.



Vacuum up the lint from the dryer vent.

Reattach the vent to the dryer and tighten the clamp back on. Plug your dryer back in or reattach your gas line and turn the dryer on. Be careful not to push the dryer back too close to the wall. This can collapse the vent and cut off exhaust, or break the gas line.

Step 4: Clean the vent from outside

In a house, you probably have access to the dryer vent from the outside. Start by removing the vent cover, unscrewing it and, if need be, removing any caulk with a utility knife.

Reach into the vent with a brush and remove built-up lint. If you have an outdoor vacuum, insert the hose to vacuum out lint from there as well. Clean lint from the cover.



Before replacing the cover, return to the dryer, plug it back in, and run it on fluff. This will help blow out any loosened lint. After about 10 minutes, turn the dryer off, place the cover back on the outside vent and re-caulk the edges to keep out drafts.

While you're cleaning the vent, you may want to throw the dryer screen in the dishwasher. Why? The dryer screen gets clogged with fabric softener and oils from dryer sheets. These oils can also prevent safe airflow. Some people prefer to use fabric softener sparingly and avoid dryer sheets for this reason.

If all goes well and you've done your job right, the dryer should be in good shape. You may want to clean your dryer vents seasonally, or four times a year, even if you can see exhaust coming from the outside vent. Better to be safe than sorry!

Source: usfa.fema.gov

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