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Dryers need proper air circulation to work right

Dear Jim: Our dryer runs longer than it used to and the utility room seems chilly. The dryer is pushed back in a corner with a bend in the duct. What can I do, and should I install a vent cover or vent it indoors? — Hank W.

Dear Hank: The situation with your dryer is all too common. Dryers are one of the major energy consumers in a home. They use a lot of energy, electricity or gas, to heat the air which flows through the damp clothes. They also suck huge amounts of already conditioned (heated or cooled) air from your house. This is replaced by outdoor air leaking in through cracks.

The first thing to do is move the dryer out from the wall and reposition the duct. Dryers need to have a lot of air flowing through them for effective drying. If the duct is squashed or has a tight bend in it, this can increase the resistance to air flow and greatly increase drying time.

Another potential problem is a dryer vent fire. When the squashed or kinked duct has restrictions, the air flow speed is reduced. This allows dryer lint to settle in the duct instead of being carried outdoors. Also, with the lower air flow, the air gets even hotter. Each year, houses are lost due fires starting in a lint-filled duct.

If you are cramped for space in the utility room, install a recessed dryer vent box kit in the wall behind the dryer. This allows you to move the dryer back further to the wall without pinching the duct. It is simple to install in the drywall, but you will probably need a new vent hole.

Another option is flat (only 3 inches deep) rectangular metal duct. It is telescopic for adjustable lengths. Run a short piece of dryer duct from the dryer to the metal duct and another straight piece to outdoors. You will also have to cut a new outdoor vent hole with this option.

The chill in your utility room during winter is likely caused by outdoor air leaking in through the dryer vent. Installing a tight-sealing outdoor vent cover is a must. The best one I have seen, which I use at my own home, is a floating-cap design by Heartland Products. It is a little pricey at about \$20, but it is effective. It is also easy to clean out any lint.

You can vent an electric (NEVER GAS) dryer indoors to save the heat and eliminate the loss of room air. This air is moist, so be aware of any moisture-related problems such as window sweating or mold. I partially heat my home with a corn/pellet stove, so the extra indoor moisture is welcomed. Use a dryer indoor venting kit with filters to catch any lint.

The following companies offer dryer vent products: Deflecto Corp. (800) 428-4328 (www.deflecto.com), Dundas Jafine (800) 387-2578 (www.dundasjafine.com), **In-O-Vate Technologies (888) 443-7937 (www.dryerbox.com)**, Heartland Products (888) 772-2345 (www.heartlandnatural.com), and Lambro Industries (800-645-2860 www.lambro.net).

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