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Posted on Sat, Jan. 01, 2005

Clothes dryers require upkeep

By DWIGHT BARNETT SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

Q: We recently purchased our first home, and I'm having trouble with my dryer. It worked fine before the move, but now I have to run it two to three time to get the clothes dry. I asked the movers if something was damaged in the move, but they told me to call a repairman. I read your article on electrical appliances being damaged by the wiring in the home. Could that be the problem?

A: During the drying process, the moisture from the clothes dryer is carried through a vent pipe to the outside of the home. The shorter the vent pipe the more efficient the drying process.

First, make sure the lint trap is clean and there is no lint build-up inside the vent pipe. If there's none and the dryer has to be operated more than once, the problem is usually a vent pipe that is too long or one that has too many turns and bends before exiting the home.

Most manufacturers recommend a maximum length of vent pipe at 25 feet, not including the elbows found in most installations. When the vent pipe has to make a 90-degree turn to pass through the floor, wall or ceiling, that 90-degree elbow is equal in restriction to a five-foot section of vent pipe. One elbow and you can only use 20 feet of vent pipe to operate the dryer efficiently. Add a 45-degree elbow, which is equal to 2 1/2 feet of vent pipe, and you have to move the dryer closer to the outside wall of the home.

Dryer vent pipes need to be checked from time to time for kinks, loose or damaged pipes, pipes that are separated at connecting joints (which dumps all the moisture to the home's interior), lint build-up that is a fire hazard, and for other blockages, such as a bird's nest, in the outside vent opening.

There should be a movable or protected cover on the outside of the home that is not blocked by vegetation or stored items. If the cover is damaged, it should be replaced.

The sections of vent pipe can be connected using pipe clamps and metallic tape. If your home has a

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flexible foil or plastic vent pipe, replace it now with an approved metal vent pipe. Plastic and most foil type vent hoses are not approved for the heat generated by a clothes dryer.

Dwight Barnett is a certified master inspector with the American Society of Home Inspectors.

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