

Good Practice Guidelines for Laundry Fire Prevention

Facility laundry fires are one of the more common incidences reported. Most of these are associated with the dryer. Commercial dryers have all the ingredients: heat, fuel, and air. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) provides the following suggestions for safe laundry operations.

1. Whenever dryers are in use - the laundry must be staffed, and staff shall be knowledgeable of who is using the dryer and what its contents are. A clothes dryer should never be left unattended while operating.
2. Preventive maintenance should be provided to all dryers, including:
 - a. the temperature probe must be maintained clean and functioning properly. Some models of commercial clothes dryers have a temperature probe inside the drum or a box that controls the upper temperature cut-off switch. When the temperature probe is covered with lint, it acts as an insulator, preventing heat transfer. In this case, the dryer continues to supply heat to the load in the dryer, even to the point of ignition.
 - b. the thermostat control must be maintained, and staff understand: what loads, require which heat setting, over what time period.
 - c. lint should not be allowed to build up in the dryer case, exhaust pipes or traps. Staff must inspect and clean all lint after each day's use of the dryers. Staff should verify daily that air is exhausted through the exhaust prior to using the dryers. If lint is accumulating on sprinkler heads, heat detectors, or anywhere outside the dryer exhaust system, there is a problem which needs to be checked by a mechanical contractor. Lint should not accumulate on the building exterior (roof, wall, or ground).
3. Dryers shall only be used by knowledgeable staff, understanding the following:
 - a. NEVER dry rubberized material, or material which may contain cleaning solvents, such as, mop heads or rags. (The most common cause of dryer fires)
 - b. know what time and temperature setting is needed for different materials, such as, cotton, wool, or synthetic, etc.
 - c. know that preventive maintenance has been provided (have a posted log), and the equipment is safe. Report any problem to maintenance for repair.
 - d. know the manufacturer's safety precautions.
 - e. when hot, dry material is removed from the dryer into a cart, process it quickly, so heat does not build-up in the cart.
 - f. know how to use laundry safety equipment, the fire plan, and practice fire drills.
4. Gas fueled dryers must have the proper amount of combustion air (intake grills shall be maintained clean and clear). This prevents incomplete combustion, which produces carbon monoxide gas. The laundry and adjacent spaces should be equipped with carbon monoxide detectors.