

HEALTH MATTERS

Fire Dangers from Clothes Dryer

Key is preventing build-up of lint

A clothes dryer clogged with lint can cause a fire and put your home at risk.

Fire department officials recommend that everyone regularly clean their dryers. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, there are an estimated 15,500 fires started by clothes dryers each year. Many of these fires might have been prevented with proper maintenance and venting.

"Dryer fires are very common and, frequently, preventable," says Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue Communications Officer Brian Barker, "Everyone should check for lint buildup in your clothes dryer."

Most clothes dryer fires can be prevented by following these safety tips:

- Never run your clothes dryer while away from your home or asleep.

- Remove lint from the traps, vents and surrounding areas of the dryer after each load of laundry.

- Avoid drying items made of plastic, foam or other synthetic materials.

- If your clothes are suddenly taking a long time to dry or clothes feel hotter than usual at the end of a cycle, your dryer may be telling you there's a problem. Look for a blockage in your dryer system.



Tualatin Valley and Fire Rescue provided this picture of a clothes dryer charred from a fire that started because of improper maintenance and venting caused by the build-up of lint.

Another Reason to Quit Smoking: Studies show your pet will thank you, too

It's well known that smoking is hazardous to people's health, and the New Year is an excellent time to kick the habit. But if you're someone who smokes who also is a pet owner, there's an additional incentive to make that New Year's resolution: your habit may be killing your beloved dog or cat.

Recent medical research shows that cats and dogs living with people who smoke risk developing cancer, allergies and other illnesses from secondhand smoke.

Unlike humans, animals do more than just inhale. Tobacco residue collects on animal fur, and cats and dogs swallow the residue when they groom themselves. Some pets even like to lick or eat cigarette butts in ashtrays. A curious puppy can die of nicotine poisoning from swallowing just two cigarette butts.

Smokers' cats are at least twice as likely to develop a deadly form of cancer called feline lymphoma, as are cats in smoke-free homes. After five years living with a smoker, that rate increases to three times as likely. When you factor in other variables — the number of smokers in the house, how many packs smoked per day — that risk can rise nearly fourfold.

This data, taken from a University of Massachusetts study, raises the question of a possible link between passive smoking and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in humans, which is similar to

lymphoma in cats.

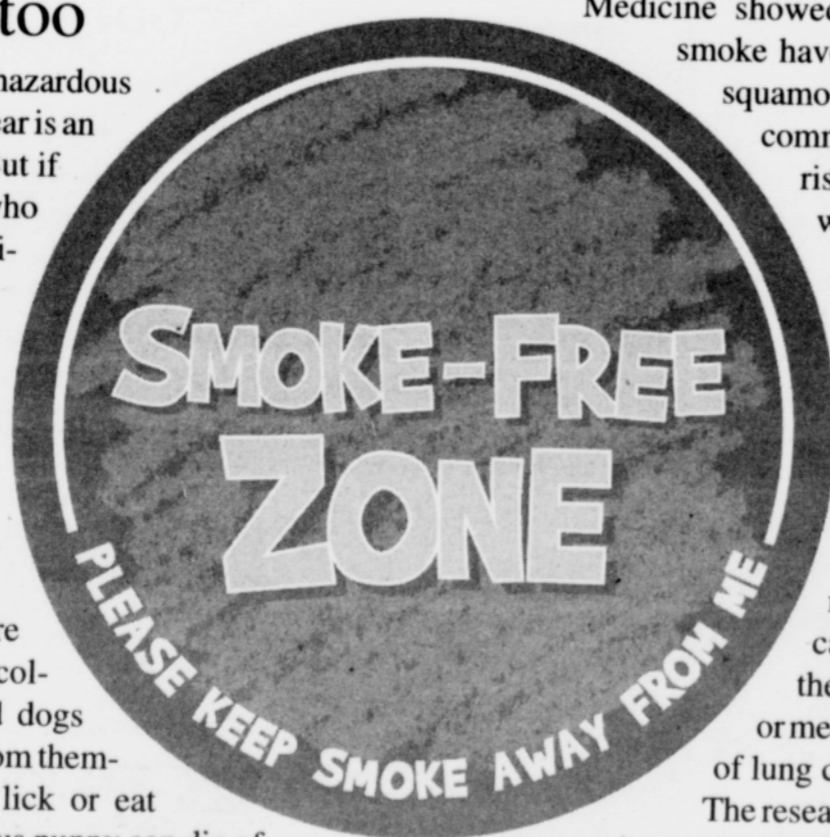
Another study by Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine showed that cats exposed to secondhand smoke have an increased chance of developing squamous cell carcinoma, a type of oral cancer commonly found in smokers. The increased risk may be due to carcinogens in smoke which settle on cats' fur and which cats ingest as they groom themselves.

Similarly dangerous to dogs, secondhand smoke raises the rates of certain cancers in canines. A Colorado State University study found dogs living with smokers had higher rates of lung and nasal cancer. Dogs with long noses are at an even greater risk of developing nasal and sinus cancer, as they expose more tissue to the carcinogens when they inhale. Short or medium-nosed dogs showed higher rates of lung cancer.

The research also showed measurable levels of carcinogenic chemicals from cigarette smoke in dogs' fur and urine for months after exposure.

Even if they do not develop cancer, all pets can have strong reactions to smoke particles in the air. Just like their human families, pets can develop respiratory infections, eye irritation, lung inflammation and asthma when exposed to secondhand smoke.

"The message is clear," said Renée Klein of the American Lung Association, "Secondhand smoke is hazardous to you and your pets. We hope this information will motivate pet owners who smoke to quit."



Few Extra Pounds Also Carry Risks

(AP) -- Lugging around a few extra pounds? One of the largest studies to look at health and weight finds that you don't have to be obese to raise your risk of premature death. Merely being overweight carries some risk, too.

Obesity increases the risk of death from heart disease, stroke and certain cancers. But whether being merely overweight contributes to an early death as well has been uncertain and controversial. Some research has suggested being a little pudgy has little effect or can even be a good thing.

The latest research involving about 1.5 million people concluded that healthy adults who were overweight were 13 percent more likely to die during the time they were followed in the study than those whose weight is in an ideal range.

"Having a little extra meat on your bones — if that meat happens to be fat — is harmful, not beneficial," said Dr. Michael Thun of the American Cancer Society, senior author of the study.

The study's conclusions, recent published in the New England Journal of Medicine, are similar to three other large studies, said the lead author, Amy Berrington of the National Cancer Institute.

"Now there's really a very large body of evidence which supports the finding that being overweight is associated with a small increased risk of death," Berrington said.