

A New Standard

Addressing the Risks of Dryer Vent Fires

It's one of the biggest frustrations for certified, legitimate air duct cleaners: Blow-and-go services stealing customers and providing less-than-quality work at super discounted rates. Certifications and standards, like The National Air Duct Cleaners Association (NADCA) standard, distinguish the quality service providers. And while the NADCA standard addresses nearly all aspects of air duct cleaning, Mike Dexter of Air Quality Control Environmental saw a need to address dryer vent fires. Dexter is a member of NADCA and serves on NADCA's Fall Technical Conference Committee.

"Part of it was because we have unique challenges here in South Florida," says Dexter. Specifically, lax construction codes and developer desires to maximize beach views have led to complex ventilation structures that can pose problems for consumer safety. "Any of the condos built here in the last 15 to 20 years are all about aesthetics. There's no function in their thinking," says Dexter. "Utilities are almost an afterthought of the machine. They run their ductwork so far they have to use booster fans and other equipment to get the air to go 50 feet from the dryer to the wall."

But mostly, Dexter started developing a dryer vent cleaning standard because of embarrassingly bad competition. "The barrier to entry is so low, just for dryer vent cleaning," he says. "There hasn't been anything standard about the process to clean those vents. I've seen guys come in



Mike Dexter and his sister, Kelly Dexter Coupe.

with leaf blowers, hoping to blow enough out the other end so that they can say 'job completed.' That's my competition."

Armed with ACR, The NADCA Standard, and the Certified Dryer Exhaust Technician (C-DET) manual procedures—the foundation for his dryer vent standard—Dexter is taking a stand against blow-and-go services and helping consumers to analyze and better compare the services offered. "What we're trying to do is standardize the process," he says. "We're offering customers one process that allows them to compare companies."

While Dexter, along with his father—the company's founder—and sister, focused efforts locally, he says that everyone can benefit from a dryer vent cleaning standard. "Dryer vent fires are a national public safety concern," he says. But, after hitting some red tape trying to partner with local fire departments on

consumer education initiatives, Dexter decided that he had to try something else. He joined forces with The Millennium Institute (www.tmsite.org), a nonprofit organization dedicated to education and advocacy for health and safety. "Shortly after, we partnered with a local fire department. There had been three dryer vent fires in this city alone," says Dexter. "That shows that there's a need for this standard and for awareness beyond just air quality control. We need to educate the public on how to clean their vents the right way."

NADCA recently announced its new dryer exhaust duct performance standard, The Dryer Exhaust Duct (DEDP) Performance Standard, much to Dexter's satisfaction. "NADCA is about bringing together like-minded people who want to do legitimate work," he says. "It's very timely that we're all thinking about dryer vent cleaning and recognize that there's a great need for the improved safety of our citizens." ●

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