



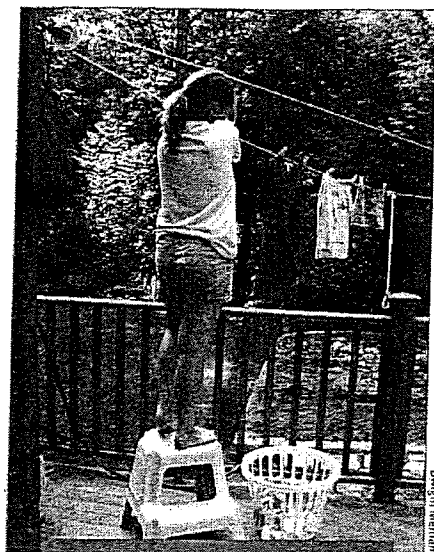
NEWS BRIEF

THE RIGHT TO DRY

By Dwight Merriam, FAICP

That clothes dryer down in your basement is sucking you dry—to the tune of \$1,530 over its 18-year lifespan (www.consumerenergycenter.org/home/appliances/dryers.html). Appliances use 17 percent of household energy, and clothes dryers are among the prime culprits (www1.eere.energy.gov/consumer/tips/appliances.html).

In round numbers, that's a ton of CO₂ per household per year. Nationwide, call it 30 million tons of coal or 33,000 rail cars full of West Virginian mountain-tops. Jeezum (as they say in Vermont—more on that later), we should all feel guilty.



In an overt act of covenant disobedience, Lucy Merriam hangs out the family wash.

Dwight Merriam

Worse yet, from 2003 to 2006 there were 15,350 residential fires caused by washers and dryers (92 percent from dryers), with 16 deaths, 433 injuries, and \$201 million in property damage (www.nfpa.org/assets/files/PDF/DryerFactSheet.pdf).

So what can you do? Simple—hang your clothes outside, like your grandmother used to do.

But wait. It may be against the law. First, there are a few municipalities that prohibit clotheslines—for example, Palm Beach, Florida, does not permit exterior clotheslines for multifamily dwellings (City Code Section 134-1872). Meanwhile, many other local governments ban clotheslines in front and side yards and require them to be screened from view.

Second, one out of five Americans, 57 million people, live under the regimes of home owners associations—many of which expressly prohibit hanging clothes outside to dry. Take, for example, the covenants on my own single-family detached lot:

“No clotheslines or wash lines shall be erected or used on any lot.” And, in an overt act of civil or at least covenant disobedience, here is our daughter, Lucy, hanging clothes out on our line.

But take heart. Change is blowing in the wind. As of last year, only Florida, Colorado, and Utah had state laws specifically protecting the rights of home owners to dry their clothes outside. This year, Vermont and Maine joined the

list of Right to Dry states, and Hawaii, for the second year in a row, enacted full protection with legislation intended “to prohibit real estate contracts, agreements, and rules from precluding or rendering ineffective the use of clotheslines on the premises of single-family dwellings or townhouses” (Senate Bill 1338, found at www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session2009/bills/SB1338_CD1_.pdf).

In 1992 Vermont became one of the first states to introduce right-to-dry legislation, but it took the Green Mountain State more than 15 years to get it enacted. As they say in Vermont—slower than cold molasses running up a steep hill in the middle of winter.

Vermont’s new law, with classic Yankee frugality, simply states that municipalities, deed restrictions, and the like cannot “prohibit or have the effect of prohibiting solar collectors, clotheslines, or other energy devices based on renewable energy resources from being installed . . .” This language follows Florida’s (www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/2010/Acts/ACT045.pdf).

A flap over aesthetics in Virginia defeated attempts to get legislation there; Maryland also saw two competing bills defeated this year. Legislation in Connecticut got nowhere this session, but the fight goes on in Oregon. For information about what’s happening in your state, check out <http://right2dry.org> and the leader in the field, Project Laundry List, at www.laundrylist.org.

Dwight Merriam, FAICP, is a lawyer with Robinson & Cole LLP in Hartford, Connecticut.

Cover photo: Private docks and boat use can pose zoning issues.
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