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Clean Laundry Appliances, Cleaner Clothes

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Once a month. That's how often home decor guru **Martha Stewart** recommends washing out a washing machine. But how often do people actually wash their washing machines? That answer may vary. One medical assistant on **Quora** said she only washes her machine once every four months because her clothes are "light- to moderately dirty." So does the filth on the clothes matter more than the maintenance of the machine? Not really.

Here are six tips for maintaining the cleanliness and functionality of laundry appliances in a rental. (Note: For tenants who live in multi-units, consider asking the property manager or landlord to make this a routine for maintenance staff.)

1. Never Mind the Filth Level. Wash the Washing Machine Regardless.

The reason washing machines need to be cleaned on a monthly basis has less to do with a tenant working in a coal mine versus a tech startup. It has more to do with bacteria from debris, detergent soap residue and bath products. Those can all clog up machines, which leads to clothes not smelling as clean as usual, along with suspicious remnants left behind (ex. pet fur, leaves, human hair).

Before starting a load, use an all-purpose cleaner around the seals and interior. Then run the machine with hot water and vinegar for one full cycle. This should flush out any remaining remnants and help keep clothes at their cleanest.

2. Clean the Lint Trap and Dryer Vent After Each Use.

While **American Home Shield** recommends getting dryer vents professionally cleaned once every six to 12 months, residents can do their part to avoid the dryer clogging up too. Located either on the top of the dryer or inside of the door, a finger swipe can be used to

clean the dryer lint screen after each use. The lint trap, on the other hand, should be cleaned out with a lint screen brush or a vacuum.

The **U.S. Fire Administration** reports that “failure to clean the dryer (34%) is the leading cause of home clothes dryer fires. While this can become especially alarming in fall and winter months, 2,900 home clothes dryer fires are reported annually. Dryer-related fires have caused approximately five deaths, 100 injuries and \$35 million in property loss. By making sure lint is cleaned out after each use, this will significantly reduce this fire hazard.

3. Don't Let a Shaky Washer Be the Norm.

Always make sure the washing machine is level. It should not be rocking, vibrating or scooting around the room. Don't assume it's rocky because of that tough floor rug. How does that explain the shakiness with a load full of T-shirts too? Not only will the scooting water do damage to the basement floor (or whichever room the washer is in), but it can also lead to unnecessary wear and tear on the actual machine. Turn the legs of the washer either counterclockwise to raise the machine or clockwise to lower it. The shaking could be as simple as one leg not being level with the others.



4. Read the Laundry Detergent Instructions.

Although consumers are fully aware that instructions are included for a reason, the thick booklets have gotten progressively smaller, thinner, transitioned from all words to photos, and a segment of the population still won't read them. Consumers may read the instructions if something fails or if they can't figure out how to operate a button, but initially reading the instructions word-for-word and page-by-page is rare. Here's why residents should read appliance instructions anyway, especially when it comes to washing machines.

According to **State Farm**, high-efficiency washers require a special, low-sudsing detergent. There may be times when the laundry detergent instructions (and the cup) say to use one amount for a load while the washing machine specifies another. The washing machine wins the debate. Additionally, those suds that seem to be doing extra cleaning on clothes will end up leaving a powdery residue (or liquid spot) on clothes. This will be especially obvious for powder detergent when the washer turns off but the soap is still sprinkled all over the clothes and near the lid.

5. Leave the Doors Open.

For the same reasons that people turn on fans and vents after mopping or cleaning a bathroom, the same goes for wet washing machines. Leave the door open after a load is complete from front-load washers and top-load washers. Give the inside time to air dry, and avoid risks of mildew and off-putting odors. Keep a towel nearby to wipe the wet rubber seal on front-loading washers, too.



6. Invest in Laundry Lint Traps for the Hose.

Usually sold in a package of two with a zip tie, this is one of those products that'll never be a bad idea to buy in bulk. As long as there are loads to wash, there will be a reason that laundry lint traps for the hose are needed. These netted products help to avoid lint from clogging the sink during the rinse cycle.

Some washers will already have a lint filter on the rim of the washer's drum; clean those too. If not (or in addition to it), the lint trap that needs a zip tie can easily be secured on the end of the water hose that hangs over the sink. Discard lint traps for the hose every three months. **Mr. Appliance** recommends using nylon pantyhose as an alternate option for residents who want to save a few dollars; just cut the foot area off with enough space for the nylon to be four to five inches long.

By using these six techniques above, appliances will last longer, clothes will be cleaner and the landlord will be less fussy about coming over for appliance repairs.

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