



Written by [Ann Shibley](#) on November 19, 2009

The Laundry Police: No-hanging Restrictions

Before the invention of clothes dryers, wet clothes were hung out in the sunshine to dry on lines strung up in many backyards. The sunshine kept clothes white, and provided that fresh, clean smell, especially noticeable when snuggling into bed at night with sheets directly off the clothes lines.

But in today's strange culture where suggestive and even smutty television is watched by millions and trips to the mall have shoppers saturated with views of skimpy lingerie and abbreviated clothing fashions, hanging simple underwear on clothes lines can [provoke reactions from neighbors](#).



Carin Froehlich is an outdoor clothes-hanging enthusiast who has received anonymous letters from neighbors saying they don't care to see her underwear waving in the wind. "They said it made the place look like trailer trash," Froehlich commented, adding she hangs her "unmentionables," so labeled by the anonymous letter writers, on the inside lines for minimum exposure. Nonetheless, she was contacted by a town official who asked her to stop drying her clothes in the sunshine.

Froehlich bundles her "right to hang" tradition in with the right to keep and bear arms. She is also writing a book on the subject, as she sees this as a freedom issue, pointing out that it saves money, as well — \$83 per month in electric bills for her family of five.

In response to situations like Froehlich's, a "right to hang" movement is marshaling forces in order to resist both government's and housing associations' attempts to restrict citizens from hanging the wash on the line in their own backyards.

Alexander Lee is a former attorney who quit his day job to run the new non-profit group, Project Laundry List. The group encourages the "green" aspects of laundering in general, claiming that by hanging out clothes or using a drying rack indoors, carbon emissions are reduced and money is saved. Lee says that dryer use accounts for six percent of all U.S. residential electricity. [PLL's website reports some interesting facts](#) and statistics on washing and drying clothes. They also promote a cross-country tour entitled "Clotheslines Across America," which is sponsored by the Vermont Country Store and Seventh Generation, both purveyors of laundry and soap products. One documentary featured on the tour is "Drying for Freedom."

With an eye on legislation, Lee reports that five states — Florida, Utah, Maine, Vermont, Colorado, and Hawaii — have already passed laws limiting government's reach toward stopping clothes hanging. Five other states, Lee says, are considering similar laws.

But opposing the "right to hang" tradition are homeowners' associations who account for 20 percent of the population, about 60 million people. Rules against outdoor clothes drying are often enforced with fines. Kevin Firth was fined \$100 by his housing association for putting up a clothesline in a common



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area of his condominium. A carpenter by trade, Firth said, "It made me angry and upset. I like having the laundry drying in the sun. It's something I have always done since I was a little kid."

A lawyer for about 50 homeowners associations, Carl Weiner, says the no-hanging rules are generally an aesthetic issue, "The consensus in most communities is that people don't want to see everybody else's laundry." He may be correct in this; Carin Froehlich's 18th-century farm house is surrounded by newer suburban houses where aesthetics certainly could come into play.

But Weiner also noted opposition to no-hanging rules may be changing owing to energy concerns or environmental issues. "There is more awareness of impact on the environment," he said. "I would not be surprised to see people questioning these restrictions."

Perhaps there is also a growing awareness of limiting the ever-expanding reach of modern-day lawmaking that is far outside the scope of our constitutional republic's true governmental role.



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