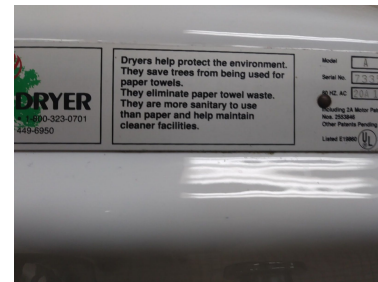


Paper Towels vs Air Drying: Which Is Better For You?

By: Paige Platter

Everyone has seen the signs that say something like “air drying reduces paper towel waste and is cleaner,” but is that true? It seems like it would be. You’re not touching anything other than the button, which you can turn on with your elbow. There’s no paper towel waste either. But is it actually cleaner?



Warm air dryers have a casing which is a dark void, perfect for bacteria to grow and spread. The University of Connecticut and Quinnipiac University did a study on bacteria growth in air dryers and found that a dryer blowing air for 30 seconds grows up to 254 colonies of bacteria. They also found that the bacteria had gotten there from lidless toilets flushing, which gave off an aerosolized fecal matter spray up to six square meters. Another study from The Journal of Applied Microbiology found that air dryers “contaminated the surrounding area with 1,300 times as many viral particles as a paper towel would.” So what does that mean and how can we fix it?

Well first, since the bacteria is coming from unlidded toilets, then we need to add lids to the toilets and remember to close them. Doing that would get rid of the aerosolized fecal matter spray and reduce the number of bacteria in the air dryer. But that wouldn’t help the areas getting contaminated with viral particles from the air blowing. So shouldn’t we just get rid of air dryers and put in paper towels?

Paper towels do give quite a lot of waste with the U.S using 13 billion pounds each year. (Ocean Conservancy). Paper towels aren’t recyclable either since they start to degrade when wet. But that’s just it, isn’t it? Degrading. What if we replaced the forced air dryers with biodegradable paper towels? We’d solve all the problems. No more germs being forced onto our hands after we washed them and no more paper towel waste for too long. Companies have already started making biodegradable paper towels. When asked about it, Bounty Paper Towels had this to say, “Our paper towels and napkins are biodegradable. We measure the biodegradability of our products using a composting test developed by the US Composting Council. Under these conditions, Bounty will biodegrade in 60 days or less.” Sixty days is roughly two months, that’s not a lot of time in the scheme of things. That’s the same amount of time it takes an apple core to decompose. (Save On Energy). So why are we still using warm air dryers, when paper towels are the obvious way to go?