

“KEEPING PACE” - #49

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BLOWBACK

The photograph below shows clothing placed too close to the burner area of a gas-fired hot water heater. A fire began there and then burned upward inside the walls to vent through the third level floor. Until I examined the insides of these walls, this fire appeared as if it had three areas of origin. A “blowback” occurs once in awhile when there is a little more gas in the appliance than normal when the gas ignites. It can sound like a “kawoomp.” The extra burning gas is forced outside the appliance, momentarily, and it can ignite nearby combustibles placed too close to the appliance.



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The next photograph shows a building totaled by a blowback fire, which obviously originated at the furnace area. The fire department saw flames shooting through the roof above the furnace when they arrived. They also found a protected spot on the carpeting near the front of the furnace, which proved that a cardboard box of papers had been placed on the floor there, too close to the furnace. The workers confirmed that there was a metal shelf full of papers located there with one end 28 inches from the furnace.



Sincerely,

Frederick F. Franklin, P.E.
Forensic Engineer