

## Clean your laser printer safely with these tips

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Cleaning a laser printer can be easy, provided you know what you're doing and use the right tools. This article will share with you some simple tips to help you clean your laser printers like a pro.

### A word to the wise

Before I begin, I'd like to stress that this article is intended only to assist with basic laser printer cleaning. If you're unsure of your ability to perform any sort of printer maintenance, or if performing such maintenance will void the printer's warranty, you should contact a qualified service professional or the manufacturer.

### Some safety issues

Though laser printers come in various shapes and sizes, they all use toner (that messy black powder). While cleaning your laser printer, the last thing you want is to have toner in your lungs or on your skin. The tips provided in this article should help reduce the chance of you being bathed in toner while cleaning your printer. Toner particles are so fine that they can take more than fifteen minutes to settle if they become airborne—make that hours if you have fans or air-conditioners circulating them through an office. To avoid inhaling toner particles, try to keep the air in the cleaning area stable and leave the printer area for several minutes after cleaning. When you return, move slowly, open all windows, and begin vacuuming any toner from the floor, tabletops, and so forth. Check out the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Indoor Environment Management Branch: Pollution Prevention page for more information on toner health concerns.

Another dangerous area common to all laser printers is the fuser-roller compartment. The fuser roller gets extremely hot during the printing process and is usually covered for safety. Burns can occur, however, if you accidentally uncover and touch the roller. I recommend that you leave your printer off for at least one hour before cleaning.

**As with all electrical equipment, make sure that the power cable is unplugged before you begin any work.**

### Tools you will need

Here are the basic tools you need to clean a laser printer:

Toner vacuum

Toner cloth

Mask

Cotton swabs

Isopropyl alcohol (99 percent pure)

Paint brush (soft bristle, about a half-inch wide)

Latex gloves (the ones used by doctors)

#### **Toner vacuum**

Household vacuum cleaners do not have filters that can trap fine toner particles. Don't even try to use one since you risk blowing toner into the air. The toner vacuum I use is made by 3M and looks like a black fishing box. It's portable, powerful, and easy to use. Vacuums range in price from \$200 to \$300, and replacement filters cost around \$30.

#### **Toner cloth**

Toner cloth is essential when cleaning laser printers. It is a special disposable cloth that attracts and traps toner particles. Usually yellow in color, toner cloths are slightly larger than letter-size paper. You "activate" the cloth by slowly stretching the sides. What the toner vacuum leaves behind, the toner cloth will pick up. Never try to reuse a toner cloth. In my book, the toner cloth is spent and ready for the trash after each use.

#### **Mask**

You'll want to prevent toner particles from entering your throat and lungs. While toner inhalation has not been proven to cause serious health problems, respiratory tract irritation can occur with exposure to large amounts of toner dust. Toner can also contain potentially hazardous compounds, such as styrene, ethyl benzene, and xylene isomers. Use a mask that filters both odors and fine particles, such as the ones used for painting and sanding. You can usually find these at local hardware stores.

#### **Cotton swabs**

You can use the regular cotton swabs found in your local drugstore or those made especially for cleaning printers. The printer swabs come with six-inch-long sticks.

#### **Isopropyl alcohol**

Do not use regular rubbing alcohol. Either use chemicals that are specifically designed to clean the heads of VCRs, cassette tapes, tape drives, and the like or use 99 percent pure isopropyl alcohol, which evaporates without leaving any residue.

#### **Paint brush (soft bristle, about a half-inch wide)**

This is used to brush out toner from tight crevices. Since bristles may fall out during the cleaning process, pull out any loose ones before you use the brush. I don't recommend using toothbrushes.

#### **Latex gloves**

These must fit tightly on your hands since you want to maintain skin sensitivity. Drugstores usually sell them in boxes of 100.

**Okay, let's begin cleaning that laser printer.**

Now that you have the tools, it's time to unplug the laser printer, let it sit for one hour, and then follow the steps below:

1. Don your mask and latex gloves.
2. Open the printer and gently remove the toner cartridge or toner bottle.

3. Use your "activated" toner cloth and wipe the toner cartridge. Place the cartridge aside on another activated toner cloth.
4. Use your toner vacuum to remove spilled toner from within the printer's internal compartment. Try to prevent the vacuum's nozzle from actually touching any of the printer's internal surfaces.
5. Use your paintbrush to remove toner from any crevices. Use gentle motions and vacuum as necessary.
6. Many laser printers use very fine wires (called corona wires) that are often exposed. If your printer has such wires, take care to avoid vacuuming or brushing them. Breaking a corona wire can be a costly mistake. Dip a cotton swab into isopropyl alcohol and gently run it along the length of the wire. Also be sure to clean the underside of the wires. Never apply pressure.
7. Reinsert the toner cartridge, close the printer, reconnect the power cord, and you are done.

#### **Avoid using the toner cloth inside the printer**

Though you can use the toner cloth to clean the inside, I do not recommend it. There are many sharp points that can tear the cloth's fiber and leave loose strands inside the printer.

#### **OEM vs. remanufactured toner cartridges (RTC)**

I highly recommend that you use original equipment manufacturer (OEM) toner cartridges. However, due to environmental and cost concerns, you might want to use RTCs. Make sure that your RTCs are from reputable suppliers. Low-quality RTCs can void your printer warranty, leak toner, and make your support work downright miserable.

#### **Get the tools you need**

I hope this article has shown you how easy it can be to safely clean your laser printer. To get the tools you need, contact a local or online printer accessories supplier.