

LOSS PREVENTION

Oily Rags in Dryers – “Recipe for Disaster”

There have been several incidents in hotels and restaurants where rags or towels that were used to clean up oily spills such as oil from deep fryers were washed and then thrown in the dryer only to burst into flames due to “spontaneous combustion” when heated. Two of these fires resulted in total building losses.

“Spontaneous combustion” is a serious source of fires wherever oily rags are used; not only restaurant or hotel laundries but also in homes, garages and workshops.

Normally, we think of a source of heat as something with a flame. There is no flaming ignition with spontaneous combustion. Rather, when flammable liquids like cooking oil or deep fryer oil are soaked up by a rag, heat develops.

If the heat is not allowed to dissipate by spreading the rags out, there could be a serious problem.

When oily rags are bunched up and piled on top of each other or especially when placed in a dryer, heat can build to a point where it ignites an already flammable material. No matches, torches or open flames are required.

Preventing spontaneous combustion from occurring is as simple as practicing a little routine housekeeping. Anytime you have an oily rag left over after a cleaning project, hang it up to dry, preferably outdoors. You can use a clothesline or a fence, but just be sure to hang each rag by itself. Don't pile them on top of each other. And if you need to hang them indoors, keep them away from heat sources such as water heaters or furnaces.

Safe Cleaning Procedures:

1. Soak up oil spills with rags or old towels.
2. If keeping rags – wash them in warm soapy water or use a degreaser.
3. Hang them outside (if possible) to dry.
4. If hanging them inside, keep them well away from heat sources such as furnaces and water heaters.
5. **DO NOT put oily rags or towels in a dryer (even if washed).**
6. If discarding oily rags – hang outside to dry before putting them in a trash bin or garbage bag.

Remember, oil soaked rags or towels present a great risk for fires. Spread them out to dry before you toss them in the trash can.

NEVER put rags in a dryer! Avoid burning down your workplace.

Plan Administrator

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