



Controlling the Hazard of Spontaneous Combustion

Over the past few months, we have experienced quite a few losses that were all attributed to spontaneous combustion. Two of the losses were:

- A fire in a residential dwelling was attributed to spontaneous combustion after the rags that were used in the finishing of the hardwood floor spontaneously combusted, resulting in extensive damage to the home.
- A fire in a high school chemistry lab was caused when chemicals discarded in a metal trashcan spontaneously combusted.

What is Spontaneous Combustion?

Spontaneous combustion is an instantaneous combustion condition that occurs without an external ignition source.


What materials can be affected by Spontaneous Combustion?

Towels, rags, certain types of air filters, paint scrapings and steel wool can spontaneously combust when oils or resins saturate the materials and are improperly handled or disposed of. Some of the materials that can contribute to spontaneous combustion when mixed with the above substrates include linseed oil, enamel resins, drying oils and various other chemicals. As the definition states, this condition can and will happen without the presence of a flame, spark or other ignition source.

What precautions should be taken to prevent Spontaneous Combustion?

There are steps you should follow to minimize the possibility of spontaneous combustion. First, research and select materials that are noted to have minimal susceptibility to spontaneously combusting. The next step is ensuring that the selected materials are used, stored and discarded according to label directions as well as complying with the MSDS. Lastly, the materials should be properly disposed of. That includes wetting the contaminated materials with water and placing them loosely inside a separate, sealed metal container with a self-closing lid.

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