

Spontaneous Combustion



Portland Fire Investigators are blaming two house fires in two weeks on spontaneous combustion. Fires on SE 60th Ave. and on NW Luray Terrace were both caused by the spontaneous combustion of oily rags. Together these two fires caused \$970,000 in loss to the homeowners.

This is the season for home improvement, which may include painting and staining decks, furniture and fences. What people don't understand is that there is real danger in not following the manufacturer's recommendations when using oil-based products for any project at work or at home.

Spontaneous combustion is caused by the breakdown of the oils in paints, stains, and other products. This breakdown generates heat and, if that heat is contained, it can build up to temperatures sufficient to ignite most combustibles like wood, rags, or paper.

There are two recommended ways to dispose of rags contaminated with oil or an oil-based product. One is to spread them out in a single layer and allow them to dry completely for several days before disposal. The second is to put the rags in a metal container with a tight-fitting lid in a shaded area with good ventilation.

Portland Fire & Rescue urges citizens to read the entire label on the products you buy and follow the manufacturer's instructions. Many products have the potential to cause spontaneous combustion, asphyxiation, or even explosions.

Be smart and be safe: **READ THE LABEL!**

Photo courtesy of Dick Harris, Portland Fire & Rescue