

NBSIA Member Services Safety Bulletin

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SAFETY WITH OILY RAGS

Oil-based paints, stains, and varnishes are often used during school district improvement projects. It is common to use rags to wipe up spills or clean brushes. But wet rags can ignite on their own. They can start a fire if not handled carefully. The same is true of the liquids themselves.

How Can Rags Start a Fire?

The oils commonly used in oil-based paints and stains release heat as they dry. If the heat is not released in the air, it builds up. That is why a pile of oily rags can be dangerous. As the rags dry, the heat becomes trapped and builds, providing an ignition source, and the rags spontaneously combust.

How Can Liquids Start a Fire?

Vapors from flammable and combustible liquids can ignite, causing a fire. There are many commonly used flammable liquids. Gasoline and lacquers are a few examples. There are also many commonly used combustible liquids, such as paint thinner, kerosene, and oil-based paints and stains.

Rags Wet with Paint and Stain

- Never leave cleaning rags in a pile. Take the rags outside to dry and hang them or spread them out to dry. Make sure they are away from buildings.
- Put dried rags in a metal container filled with water and detergent and seal with a tight lid. This will help break down the oils.
- Keep the metal container in a cool place, out of direct sunlight, away from other heat sources

Liquids That Can Catch Fire

- Flammable and combustible liquids should not be used near an open flame. Do not smoke when working with these liquids.
- If you spill liquids on your clothing, remove clothing and place it outside to dry. Once dry, it can be laundered.



- Keep liquids in their original containers, tightly capped or sealed. Never store the liquids in glass containers.

Gasoline

- Use gasoline only as motor fuel. Never use it as a cleaner. Never use it to break down grease. Never bring gasoline indoors, even in small amounts.
- Store gasoline ONLY in a container that is sold for that purpose. Make sure the container is tightly capped when not in use. NEVER store gasoline containers in a basement or in the occupied space of a building. Keep them in an outbuilding, a detached garage, or a shed outdoors.

Sources :
<http://www.nfpa.org/~media/files/public-education/resources/safety-tip-sheets/oily-ragssafetytips.pdf?la=en>

Contact Us

(707) 428-1830
www.nbsia.org

Suzanne Dillman
Jeremy Hatch
Matt Boughtin
Amanda Prieto
Jaclyn Moraida

SuzanneD@nbsia.org
JeremyH@nbsia.org
MatthewB@nbsia.org
AmandaP@nbsia.org
JaclynM@nbsia.org

