



# Weekly Safety Meeting

Your Safety Is Our Business®

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## Worksite Safety – Oil or Solvent-Soaked Rags

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The accumulation of oil- or solvent-soaked rags in the normal daily function of a shop, manufacturing, or construction environment can be a major safety issue. Oil-soaked rags are a spontaneous combustion hazard because as the oil oxidizes, heat is released. If the heat is not dissipated, it can build up and ignite the rags. Special oily-waste cans should be used to store oil-soaked rags. These containers allow air to flow around the rags, thus dissipating the heat. The waste cans should not have plastic liners, and they should be emptied daily.

Oil and solvent-soaked rags must be stored and disposed of properly to prevent combustion fires. It is important to maintain proper fire extinguishing equipment and smoke detectors in all areas where flammable and combustible materials are being used and stored.

A number of materials are moderately or highly subject to spontaneous heating and subsequent ignition. Some of those you may find in your work area include:

- Oil-based paint in contact with rags, cotton, or other fibrous combustible material;
- Rags that are damp with any one of a number of different types of oils, including vegetable oils;
- Oily uniforms or work clothes; and
- Paint scrapings, possibly coming from a paint spray booth cleaning project.

### Oil-soaked vs. solvent-soaked rags:

Oil-soaked rags are, as noted, a spontaneous combustion hazard because as the oil oxidizes, heat is released. Solvent-soaked rags are not a spontaneous combustion hazard but may be a fire hazard, since many solvents are flammable. In addition, the solvents can evaporate, creating a health hazard. Solvent-soaked rags should be placed in closed containers to reduce evaporation and minimize the chance of someone tossing a lit cigarette onto them and causing a fire. The container should be emptied daily and the solvent should be allowed to evaporate outside.

### Controlling Spontaneous Combustion:

Storing oil soaked rags in specially designed metal cans that safely contain a self-ignited fire controls and the danger of spontaneous combustion. These containers are made of metal and have self-closing covers. They need to be elevated so that the heat from a fire within the container won't ignite a wooden floor or other combustibles under the container.

The risk of spontaneous combustion is virtually eliminated by limiting the oxygen in the container. The oxidation process will use up the oxygen in the container stopping the reaction, thus preventing a fire.



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## Housekeeping:

Good housekeeping is essential to prevent fires. Oil-soaked combustible materials are subject to being ignited by other sources of ignition such as welding sparks, cutting torch slag, grinding, or discarded smoking materials. Oily waste cans placed at key locations will minimize the fire hazard of soaked rags.

## Safety Cans:

Oily waste containers should bear the label of a recognized testing laboratory such as Underwriters Laboratories or Factory Mutual. The label will ensure the product has been tested and certified to meet the high standards of safety and quality.

OSHA Compliant Oily Waste Cans are essential whenever solvent-soaked cloths and wiping rags are used. Rags and cloths soaked with solvents, thinners, linseed oil, combustible adhesives, and other flammable liquids present a serious fire risk when improperly discarded. The specially designed lid opens no more than 60 degrees and stays closed when not in use, isolating contents from fire sources and limiting oxygen so spontaneous combustion risk is virtually eliminated. Round construction and an elevated bottom encourage circulation of air around the can to disperse heat and reduce moisture buildup and rusting.

## OSHA Requirements:

All solvent waste, and oily rags shall be kept in fire resistant covered containers until removed from worksite and disposed of daily.

**Safety can distinguish you...Lack of safety can extinguish you!!**



