



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF LOUISIANA STATE FIRE MARSHAL

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State Fire Marshal Warns of Unexpected Spring Fire Hazard

BATON ROUGE, LA- Spring is officially in the air, which usually means an increase in cleaning and improvement projects. But that means chemicals are also in the air, and sometimes, those chemicals, including oil-based paints, stains and varnishes, can become an unexpected fire hazard.

State Fire Marshal Chief H. "Butch" Browning wants all Louisiana citizens to be aware of the phenomenon of spontaneous ignition, also known as spontaneous combustion.

According to the NFPA, spontaneous ignition is a byproduct of spontaneous heating, which occurs when a material increases in temperature without drawing heat from its surroundings. Oily rags and towels covered with chemicals like linseed and turpentine are the most common catalysts for spontaneous ignition fires reported. The NFPA reports more than 14,000 fires occur annually due to spontaneous ignition with 1,600 of those occurring in homes.

Last week, there were three reports of fires across Louisiana resulting from spontaneous ignition of cleaning rags. In one case investigated by SFM deputies, a bucket of rags used to clean kitchen appliances caught fire inside of a hospital in Jonesboro. Staff members noticed the fire quickly and were able to extinguish it without any damage beyond the bucket. Another case occurred inside of a home under construction in Prairieville where rags used to stain wood were discarded into a garbage can, which was left inside of the home and caught fire overnight. The fire incinerated the garbage can containing the rags and burned itself out, but not before causing minor damage to nearby construction materials and extensive, costly smoke damage throughout the remainder of the house. Fortunately, no injuries were reported in either incident.

The SFM recommends several options for used-rag disposal to avoid experiencing this phenomenon in your home or business:

- Never discard oily rags together in any kind of container right after use
- Thoroughly and individually dry rags outside on concrete and out of direct sunlight before disposal
- Fill a metal can with water, place the rags into the can then secure the can closed before disposing
- Never leave disposal cans and/or buckets with oily rags indoors, including in garages