



**GUILD
OF CLEANERS
& LAUNDERERS**

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AMBER ALERT

Amber Alert

December 2019 Issue No B111

Risk of Spontaneous Combustion

A persistent problem in our industry is Spontaneous Combustion and it is a Very Serious cause of Fires!

The problem is with Hot work left in a tumble dryer or a work trolley and the other problem is off Compression of work when it contains residual soiling.

Particular care should be exercised with fabrics which have been soiled with oils, greases, or other combustible substances. (Flash point or ignition temperature of fabric will be reduced under these circumstances.)

Mixed fibres in a load to be dried can also cause a problem because different fibres do not have the same moisture content neither do they dry at the same rate. For example dry polyester only holds 0.4% when dry but cotton will hold 8%.

When the water is taken out of polyester it then gets hot and if it is a polyester micro fibre cleaning cloth in with other items such as cotton cleaning cloths or aprons it will dry very quickly but the others will be slower to dry out. When taken from the tumble dryer the micro fibre cloth will be very hot and if not adequately cooled down can become the ignition for residual oil remaining in the other cotton items in the same load.

It is essential the wash process should be adequate for the soiling present and oil soaked items do present a problem with wash processes. If you regularly wash oil soaked items then you should be using an emulsifier designed to work on the oil soiling contaminating the wash load and not all emulsifiers are the same. For example an emulsifier designed for spa oils is not the same as the one needed for engineers and garage trade oils and kitchen grease is not the same either. Ask your chemical supplier for the emulsifier to remove the type that contaminates your items. Wash programme temperatures for oil soiling are always very hot temperatures because this is what helps to emulsify the oil as well and remember seldom can you process oil contaminated items in a one wash sequence, it usually takes a two bath, or more, programme.

Remember a fire is not just an inconvenience it can be a business closure.

Give staff regular briefings about the dangers and causes of fires, avoid using tumble dryers late to towards the end of a shift so that all dried items can be folded or spread about to cool down before leaving the premises. Do not tolerate incomplete oil soil removal in a wash sequence.

Sadly it is a fact too many fires occur when the premises are unattended.

“Obviously we cannot say that other items of the same type will have the same problem, or that a different method of cleaning may have had a more satisfactory result, because this was not tested, but we advise caution and that you carry out your own test if you are going to clean this type of garment.”