Spontaneous Combustion and Fire Safety (Safety Brief)

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PACIF has developed Safety Briefs to help municipal highway supervisors maintain a high level of safety and hazard awareness among employees. We recommend using these short "tailgate trainings" on a regular basis – and **at least once a month**. If you need a particular safety topic, please contact us at losscontrol@vlct.org.

Information for Supervisors

While spontaneous human combustion is an ongoing topic of debate, there is no doubt that rags and other cloth items containing flammable or combustible liquids have "self-ignition" potential. So-called "oily rags" have a long history of being a source of fire, because they are commonplace and many people are unaware of the hazard they pose.

Use the information below to inform your employees about "oily rags", their potential for spontaneously catching fire, and other measures you want them to adhere to in order to prevent a fire from occurring in your workplace.

Talking Points for Training

Clothing, rags, or other fibrous organic materials that contain oils, fuels, flammable solvents, thinners, oil-based paints and similar flammable or combustible products are examples of items that can ignite "spontaneously" during the drying process and under the right conditions. Paint scrapings and filters from spray booth cleaning projects are beyond the scope of this guidance.

These events occurred at Vermont municipalities and serve as valuable lessons for your employees. If a fire occurred in your garage and damaged all your equipment, how would you be able to service the roads?

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- Linseed oil contaminated rags that were used to coat a wood panel on a fire truck were placed in the regular trash and later "self-ignited", causing major damage to a municipal fire station.
- Rags soaked with exterior varnish were placed in a metal container and eventually self-ignited. The heat generated from the fire within the container (which may not have been fully closed) was sufficient to ignite nearby combustible materials, causing damage to the town garage and much of the equipment within.

Explain ways to reduce the potential for spontaneous combustion and other fire hazards.

- If you have rags that are soaked in flammable liquids, drying them (outdoors) is a good option. Once dried, they should still be placed in an appropriate container with tight fitting lid. Do not dry them indoors!!
- Rags with small quantities of oils, or greases, should be placed into a metal container with tight fitting lid (self closing lids are preferred). These rags should be disposed of or cleaned by a qualified vendor.

Safety Training Attendance Roster

Trainer:	Training Date:
1.	9.
2.	10.
3.	11.
4.	12.
5.	13.
6.	14.

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7.	15.
8.	16.

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