**Risk Alert: Spontaneous Fires in Laundered Towels,**

**Uniforms and Linens**

Serious and damaging fires in recently laundered textiles such as towels, uniforms, cleaning rags and linens are becoming a significant and serious problem. These destructive fires are occurring within an everyday process that both households and business undertake on a regular basis in a manner not readily recognized as being a danger. Fires are occurring following the laundering of items that are then stacked, folded or rolled and placed in a bin, basket or shelved. This is something that typically would occur at the conclusion of the laundry process when clean items are prepared for future use.

These fires do not start out as true and noticeable free burning fires but develop progressively based upon conditions. This is what makes this phenomenon so unique and which generally leads to more significant fires developing before they are detected by an internal alarm system or reacted to by the full on activation of an automatic fire sprinkler system if they are not readily discovered by employees.

While actual open flames do not begin right away the stage is set for a substantial fire to occur when what would be considered normal circumstances allow for continued heating within stacked or rolled materials. Heating within the laundered items continue to a point where open flames appear and contact the material and surrounding combustibles.

The mechanics of the spontaneous fire process is very basic and the conditions needed to have spontaneous combustion are always present in the laundry process they being heat, combustible fabrics traces of contaminates remaining within the laundered items, and finished stacked or tightly rolled items.

It is now known that modern laundry products and procedures may not remove all contaminates from soiled items, traces of cleaning products, oils and fats now remain in laundered items. The remaining trace elements contribute to the spontaneous ignition of textiles especially those with a high cotton content. Items with contaminates remaining heated by the drying process that are stacked or rolled and placed in containers or bins are the legs of the triangle that lead to combustion. Removing or changing the characteristics of any of these items should reduce the potential for spontaneous fires to occur.

Steps to prevent spontaneous fires within your facility and more information regarding this topic may be found at <http://www.mcclureindustries.com/Reports/Spontaneous_Ignition.pdf>

The following sheet can be posted in your laundry area to assist in training employees in preventing spontaneous fires in textiles and reminding them of the hazard.

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Prevention Tips

* Do not allow finished items to remain in the dryer for extended periods or overnight.
* Clean lint traps and vent components on a regular and ongoing schedule.
* Do not allow finished laundry to stay in a cart or hamper, process laundered items in a timely manner and never allow laundered items direct from the dryer to remain in a cart or hamper overnight.
* Do not stack or roll items immediately upon removal from dryer.
* Allow items removed directly from the dryer or cart to cool so they are no longer hot to the touch before stacking or rolling.
* Be aware of dryer temperatures being used and cool down times needed to reduce the heat of the laundered objects.
* Do not place stacked or rolled items tightly within holding bins.
* Proper laundry soaps or chemicals should be used when laundering oily or greasy items.
* Oily or greasy items should be laundered immediately and never allowed to accumulate in piles or stacks.