



Fire Safety Advice Sheet

Self-heating of oil soaked towels

Fire caused by laundry taken directly from a tumble dryer and stored without being left in the dryer to complete its cooling cycle.

Towards the end of the working day, staff at a commercial laundry had washed and dried towels and cloths from one of their clients at a pub with a restaurant attached.

Having removed the clean laundry from the tumble dryer, the items were folded and loaded it into bin liners and placed on the floor in front of shelving containing other laundered items before leaving the premises for the day.

The following morning, the occupants of an upstairs flat awoke to find their flat smoke logged. They alerted the fire service and were fortunately able to escape safely.

Fire investigators ruled out a number of ignition sources, including gas, electricity, friction, smoking and sunlight. On questioning the laundry staff, it became clear that the clean laundry in the bin liner had not been allowed to cool sufficiently and was the most likely cause of the fire.

Cotton laundry such as chefs' whites, aprons, tea towels and cloths are often contaminated with organic cooking oils that can auto-ignite if dried and stored without allowing sufficient time to cool in the tumble dryer.

The same principle applies to towels, bedding etc. which have been contaminated with organic oils used for massage in spa treatment/heath centres.

Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service's Business Fire Safety Team would like to pass on relevant advice on how to minimise the risks from fire at premises such as:

- Bed & Breakfast / Guest Houses
- Hotels
- Public Houses
- Restaurants and Cafes
- Schools
- Residential Care Premises



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Safety Message



- Ensure wash temperatures and detergents are suitable for the optimum removal of oil based contaminants.
- Allow laundry to complete the cooling cycle in the tumble dryer.
- Shake out laundry to ventilate before folding or place garments on hangers.
- Ensure stack or pile is well ventilated.
- Test your smoke alarm regularly.



- Place warm, damp laundry in polythene bags or plastic containers/baskets or in poorly ventilated areas.
- Leave freshly laundered fabrics stacked overnight.
- Remove laundry from the tumble dryer before completing the cooling cycle.