

# Take a proactive approach to loss prevention!

## HIDDEN DANGER IN THE KITCHEN

Business lunches, friends getting together, intimate dinners: your customers come to your restaurant for good food and a pleasant time.

To make it happen, a manager needs to observe and enforce certain rules to keep guests and employees safe.

In commercial kitchens, the biggest risk for fire is of course the cooking appliances. Aware as you are, you set them up according to code and protect them with a fire suppression system. These systems can prevent some of the worst and most destructive fires by containing them close to the source. But they are not enough. They need to be reinforced by other precautions to maintain the safest environment, and in particular to counter an insidious fire hazard.

Oils and grease are part of life in the kitchen but when they become soaked into rags, they become a problem that can lead to a fire. It may surprise you to learn that some insurance policyholders have experienced major fires started by the spontaneous combustion of rags.



### HOW DOES SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION OCCUR?

Chefs, cooks and helpers commonly use various oils and fats that can splatter off cooking surfaces and need to be wiped up regularly. After a certain amount of time, many of these products can react with the porous fabric of the rags. Cotton is especially sensitive to this.

This gradual chemical reaction, called exothermic oxidation, gives off heat, which in turn accelerates the reaction. The temperature can increase so much that the fabric spontaneously bursts into flames, which can spread through a room and turn into a full-blown fire.

For example, a pile of rags saturated with cooking oil that have been thrown into a basket could, in the worst case, spontaneously combust in the space of a few hours. To avoid this risk, it is best to wash all used rags before the end of the day. Unfortunately, ordinary laundry detergents do not have enough degreasing power to remove all residues that could cause a fire in the dryer or even in a hot stack of towels that have come out of the dryer.

### Our recommendations

To avoid the risk of an accident that might endanger everything you have worked for, we advise kitchen managers to follow these rules:

- Never let used rags or serviettes wash them as soon as possible, and always on the same day;
- Use a commercial laundry detergent with a degreaser, and, for more effective removal of oils:
  - Wash in hot water on a heavy-duty cycle; and
  - Do not fill the washer to full capacity;
- Dry at low temperature (delicate setting), and use the cooling cycle, if the dryer has one; and finally;
- Remove rags from the dryer immediately and let them cool off.

### CONCLUSION

Spontaneous combustion is a serious risk, but one that is relatively easy to avoid if you, as manager, make sure staff adhere strictly to these few safety rules. You'll be ensuring your customers' full enjoyment of your dining room.

**If you have any questions about insurance protection for restaurants, please call your broker.**

