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Poudre Fire Authority investigators determine cause of fatal Fort Collins house fire

Following a time-intensive and scientific process, Poudre Fire Authority investigators determined the cause of a fatal Oct. 8 house fire to be accidental.

Investigators say the fire's heat source was the spontaneous heating and combustion of improperly stored oil-soaked rags. These were used by a contractor hired to stain the back deck at the single-family home, at 4512 Idleale Drive in Fort Collins.

This tragic event serves as a reminder to people to always properly store and dispose of rags, brushes or other tools used for staining or painting. Piles of rags are prone to spontaneous combustion because they trap heat. The fabric often has a relatively low ignition point, otherwise known as the temperature at which they ignite.

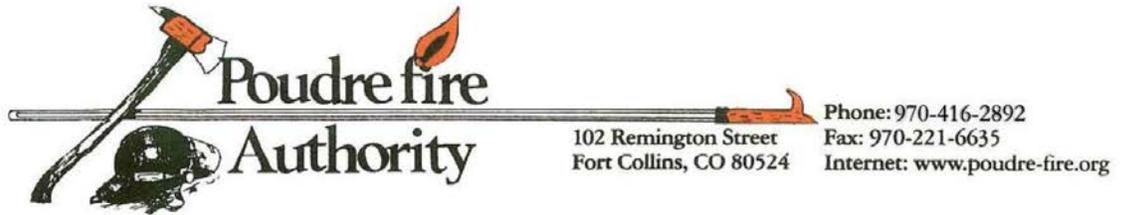
About 1,600 residences each year experience fires due to spontaneous combustion or chemical reaction. The most common causes of these fires are oily rags, [according to a 2011 National Fire Protection report](#).

The safest way to store and dispose of flammable oily rags is to:

- Place the rags in an empty metal container with a tight metal lid (think an old paint can).
- Fill the container with water to submerge the rags.
- Tightly seal the container with its *metal* lid. A plastic lid is *not* OK.
- Dispose of the container at a local hazardous waste disposal site. Never pour oily water down a drain in or around your home.

PFA investigators came to their conclusion following a more than weeks-long process that involved the meticulous documentation and study of the fire scene. The investigation included interviews with witnesses, burn-pattern analysis, and a scientific process of elimination. Investigators first determine a fire's origin and then work to disprove hypotheses until they make a conclusion about a fire's cause.

The woman who died was the sole occupant of the home at the time of the fire. It appeared that she may have attempted to move to a second-floor bedroom window but was unable to escape. The investigation provided further clarity about this point. Initial scene reports shared by PFA were that she had broken the window, a detail later shown to be untrue.



Poudre Fire Authority crews were dispatched to the home at 4:41 a.m. The first-arriving unit got on scene at 4:48 a.m. and found the back of the two-story, single-family home fully involved in fire. Firefighters made a quick attack and searched for potential victims and found the woman during their search.

Poudre Fire Authority doesn't release the names of patients or people involved in emergency incidents out of respect for their privacy.

The fire caused significant damage throughout the home, and extended to the basement and roof.

UCHealth EMS units responded to the scene. They transported the woman by ambulance to Poudre Valley Hospital. The Larimer County Sheriff's Office also responded and assisted at the scene.

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