January 22, 2026

FIRE PREVENTION & COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION DIVISION

INFORMATION NOTICE 2026-01

SUBJECT: Requirements for the safe disposal of products that are capable of spontaneous combustion or ignition from vapors, i.e., oily rags or similar waste products.

EFFECTIVE: January 22, 2026 **Shall apply indefinitely, and in accordance with any updates to any adopted Fire Code.*

CODE REFERENCES: IFC, Sections 304.1; 304.2; 304.3; 304.3.1; 304.3.2; 304.3.3; 304.3.4; 304.3.5 (2024 edition as adopted for all sections noted)

SCOPE:
This document outlines the minimum requirements for the safe disposal (both indoors and outdoors) of oily rags and other waste products that are capable of spontaneous combustion or ignition from vapors.

These conditions shall apply to all facilities, occupancies, and operations within the Poudre Fire Authority's (PFA's) jurisdiction and regardless of being temporary, occasional, or routine in nature. These requirements shall apply to schools and educational facilities; service and repair facilities; places where flammable/combustible finishes or coatings are applied; manufacturing or fabrications facilities; maintenance facilities or areas; or as otherwise required by PFA's fire code official. These requirements shall supersede any previous requirements or approvals.

These requirements shall be considered the minimum for providing a reasonable level of life-safety and property protection. In all circumstances, manufacturer-specific requirements shall apply in addition to these requirements. Safety requirements can be found on both the product container and manufacturer-provided safety data sheets (SDSs).

This document is limited to the disposal of waste materials, and does not address the use or application of flammable or combustible finishes or other safety requirements as set forth by the adopted Fire Code and any manufacturer's requirements. The use or application of flammable or combustible liquids, finishes, or coating shall be in accordance with IFC Chapter 24, Flammable Finishes. Please work with PFA as it involves requirements for any flammable vapor areas, spray finishing, dipping operations, powder coating, electrostatic apparatus, organic peroxides and dual-component coatings, floor surfacing and finishing operations, or other conditions.

As per the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), an average of 1,700 fires per year are caused by instances of spontaneous combustion or chemical reaction. Additionally, and average of 900 fires per year are started when oily rags catch fire or are ignited. (NFPA Safety Guide, *Safety with Oily Rags wet with flammable or combustible liquid*, 2019)

NATURE OF THE HAZARDS:

Oxidation & Spontaneous Combustion-
Many oil-based paints, stains, varnishes, and other coatings (finishes) release heat as they dry through a chemical reaction known as oxidation. When this heat is not effectively released to the atmosphere during the drying process, it builds up. This is why a pile of oily rags can be extremely dangerous; the heat generated during the drying process is not adequately released when rags are folded onto themselves or discarded in piles. This heat is sufficient to ignite the rags and adjacent combustible materials. This is especially dangerous when ignition occurs inside of waste receptacles or buildings where fire extension is likely.

Vapor-related Ignition Hazards-
Vapors from flammable and combustible liquids on waste products can ignite readily when exposed to an ignition source. Common flammable or combustible vapors include gasoline, lacquers, nail polish remover, or similar. Common combustible liquids include paint thinners, kerosene, and oil-based paints, stains, varnishes, or similar. Flammable/combustible vapors can travel well beyond the immediate area of use, and when combined with the oxygen present in the air, can readily ignite with an ignition source. Common ignition sources can be an open flame, a heating device, a cellular phone or other electronic devices, a building's electrical system, an operating motor, connecting or disconnecting electrical plugs, or static electricity from clothes or movement.

TECHNICAL INTERPRETATION - REQUIREMENTS:
Applies to All Disposal Conditions for Waste Products That Are Capable of Spontaneous Combustion or Ignition from Vapors-

Disposal Container(s)-
Under no circumstances shall waste products be disposed of in general waste receptacles where they are capable of spontaneous combustion and ignition. This includes oily rags, paper towels, foam or bristle brushes, applicators, or anything that has been subject to the application or use of flammable/combustible liquids, finishes, or coatings, and where said waste products have not been fully dried and made safe as outlined in this document.

Where flammable and combustible finishes and liquids are used, either temporarily, occasionally, or routinely, a listed waste disposal container shall be provided, used, and emptied daily. Disposal containers shall have dedicated permanent placement and shall maintain a minimum clearance of 3-feet to any adjacent combustible surfaces or materials.

PFA approves the following listed waste disposal containers:

- UL listed oily waste cans as manufactured by Justrite.
- UL listed oily waste cans as manufactured by Eagle.
- Other UL listed cans or products as approved by PFA's fire code official. Please submit any proposed containers for approval prior to use.

**Please note that many high-density polyethylene (HDPE) models indicate that they are "FM Approved" but are not UL listed, and therefore are not approved by PFA.*

Required Signage-
General Rubbish Receptacles- Permanent and durable signage shall be provided in the vicinity of each general rubbish receptacles which states "DO NOT DISPOSE OF OILY RAGS OR SIMILAR WASTE." Signage

shall have text of a plain font, a minimum of 1-inch in height, and the text shall contrast with the signage background.

Listed Waste Disposal Containers- Additionally, permanent and durable signage shall be provided above each oily waste disposal container which states "OILY RAGS ONLY." Signage shall meet the criteria as noted above.

Signage which does not specifically meet these requirements but meets the intent of these requirements may be approved by PFA at the discretion of PFA's fire code official.

Policies, Procedures & Training-

Persons who are responsible for the application or use of flammable or combustible liquids, finishes, coating, or similar, shall have training in proper disposal procedures. It shall be the responsibility of the property owner, the business operator, and the responsible managing employee(s) for ensuring that this is enforced by means of written policies and procedures and training. A copy of these policies and procedures shall be made available for review by the PFA Fire Inspector at the time of any fire inspection.

Disposal Methods-

Used waste materials inside approved listed disposal containers and awaiting disposal shall be removed daily or per shift as appropriate. The procedure for removal shall be as follows:

- Shall be assigned to a designated responsible person.
- Waste materials shall be transferred to a metal can with a tight-fitting lid and partially filled with water prior to final disposal, such as a metal gallon paint can, etc.
- Waste materials may be permitted to be hung for drying when placed in an approved flammable vapor area or flammable finish spray booth with a dedicated fire protection system and as approved by PFA's fire code official.
- It shall NOT be permitted to lay out rags or waste materials for drying in any area that is not approved by PFA's fire code official, including outdoors.
- Other means and methods may be approved by PFA if it can be demonstrated that an appropriate degree of life-safety can be achieved.

Primary Rubbish/Trash Containers-

Any containers or dumpsters used for the primary disposal of trash or rubbish shall meet the following criteria:

- Shall be a bin or container which is made with a low heat release rate (peak heat release rate shall not exceed 300 kW/cubic meters where tested in accordance with ASTM E1354 at an incident heat flux of 50 kW/cubic meters in the horizontal orientation). Your waste disposal service provider may need to furnish proof or additional information which indicates that this requirement is met. PFA will require a steel container or dumpster with a steel lid where this cannot be verified.
- Any container with a capacity greater than 40-gallons shall have a lid, and the lid shall be made of noncombustible materials or a low heat release rate that meets the requirements above.
- Dumpsters with an individual capacity of 1-cubic yard (200-gallons) or more shall not be stored in buildings or placed within 5-feet of combustible walls, openings or combustible roof eave lines unless the dumpsters are constructed of noncombustible materials or low heat release rate materials in accordance with the requirements above. Exceptions to this include:

    - When the dumpster is protected by an automatic fire sprinkler.
    - Storage in a structure is permitted when the construction is Type IA or IIA and located 10-feet or more from other buildings, and is designed for and used exclusively for dumpster/rubbish container storage.
- Dumpsters with an individual capacity of 1.5-cubic yards or more shall not be stored in buildings or placed within 5-feet of combustible walls, openings, or combustible roof eave lines. Exceptions to this include:
    - When the dumpster is protected by an automatic fire sprinkler.
    - Storage in a structure is permitted when the construction is Type IA or IIA and located 10-feet or more from other buildings, and is designed for and used exclusively for dumpster/rubbish container storage.
    - Dumpsters or containers that are located adjacent to buildings where the exterior area is protected by an approved fire sprinkler system.

Insurance Requirements-
PFA does not enforce requirements of your insurance provider. In the interest of risk reduction, PFA encourages you to verify with your insurance provider or other regulatory stakeholders if additional requirements or safety measures apply.

Please note that spontaneous combustion fires are a common but preventable occurrence. In the event of a fire or a subsequent fire investigation, these requirements may be furnished to your insurance provider through the public record request process.

APPLICABLE CODE REFERENCES:
IFC, 304.1 Waste accumulation prohibited- *Combustible waste material creating a fire hazard shall not be allowed to accumulate in buildings or structures or upon premises.*

IFC, 304.2 Storage- *Storage of combustible rubbish shall not produce conditions that will create a nuisance or a hazard to the public health, safety, or welfare.*

IFC, 304.3 Containers- *Containers for combustible rubbish and waste material located within or near a structure shall comply with Sections 304.3.1 through 304.3.7.*

IFC, 304.3.1 Spontaneous ignition- *Materials susceptible to spontaneous ignition, such as oily rags, shall be stored in a listed disposal container. Contents of such containers shall be removed and disposed of daily.*

IFC, 304.3.2 Low heat release materials- *Where required by this section, low heat release materials shall exhibit a peak rate of heat release not exceeding 300 kW/cubic meters where tested in accordance with ASTM E1354 at an incident heat flux of 50 kW/cubic meters in the horizontal orientation.*

IFC, 304.3.3 Capacity exceeding 5.33 cubic feet- *Containers with a capacity exceeding 5.33 cubic feet (40 gallons) (0.15 cubic meters) shall be provided with lids. Containers and lids shall be constructed of noncombustible materials or low heat release materials in accordance with Section 304.3.2.*

IFC, 304.3.4 Capacity of 1 cubic yard or more- *Dumpsters with an individual capacity of 1.0 cubic yard [200 gallons (0.76cubic meters)] or more shall not be stored in buildings or placed within 5 feet (1524*

mm) of combustible walls, openings or combustible roof eave lines unless dumpsters are constructed of noncombustible materials or low heat release rate materials in accordance with Section 304.3.2.

Exceptions:

1. *Dumpsters in areas protected by an approved automatic sprinkler system installed throughout in accordance with Section 903.3.1.1, 903.3.1.2 or 903.3.1.3.*
2. *Storage in a structure shall not be prohibited where the structure in of Type I or IIA construction, located not less than 10 feet (3048 mm) from other buildings and used exclusively for dumpster or container storage.*

IFC, 304.3.5 Capacity exceeding 1.5 cubic yards- *Dumpsters and containers with an individual capacity of 1.5 cubic yards [40.5 cubic feet (1.15 cubic meters)] or more shall not be stored in buildings or placed within 5 feet (1524 mm) of combustible walls, openings or combustible roof eave lines.*

Exceptions:

1. *Dumpsters or containers that are placed inside buildings in areas protected by an approved automatic sprinkler system installed throughout in accordance with Section 903.3.1.1, 903.3.1.2 or 903.3.1.3.*
2. *Storage in a structure shall not be prohibited where the structure in of Type I or IIA construction, located not less than 10 feet (3048 mm) from other buildings and used exclusively for dumpster or container storage.*
3. *Dumpsters or containers that are located adjacent to buildings where the exterior area is protected by an approved automatic sprinkler system.*

APPROVED:

Shawn McGaffin, Division Chief – Fire Marshal

Poudre Fire Authority
Fort Collins Colorado