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Village of Wilmette Fire Department and UL Partner to Educate Fire Personnel and the Public about Spontaneous Combustion

WILMETTE, IL. (July 28, 2020) – The Village of Wilmette Fire Department and UL have partnered to increase education about the potential hazards from discarded oil-soaked rags and the risk of auto ignition—or a fire that starts from a chemical reaction without a flame. After two significant house fires in Wilmette where this was the cause, Wilmette’s Fire Chief Ben Wozney reached out to Northbrook-based UL to assist in developing educational materials to help people understand the risk and take the necessary safety measures.

In response, UL produced two videos—one is an engaging animated video targeted to the general public and children that features a catchy song with the message “Stop and think! Dry. Dunk. Dispose.” For the other video, UL recreated the hazard in its laboratory and filmed how oil-soaked rags can catch fire. The demonstration video, which also includes footage from one of the Wilmette house fires, will be shared with fire departments in the U.S. and Canada to raise awareness about the dangers.

Chief Wozney said, “We appreciate the partnership with UL to help us get the word out about the risk of oil-soaked rags self-igniting. We want people to know that this can be very dangerous. By taking steps to dispose of these rags properly, we can prevent serious fires like those we saw in Wilmette that caused serious property damage and displaced these residents for months.”

The chemical reaction can happen when rags are used in common oil-based paints and stains. When not disposed of properly, the chemicals produce heat, which gets trapped, builds up and ignites. Likewise, vapors from flammable and combustible liquids—ranging from gas to nail polish to oil-based paints—can also ignite. According to the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA), an average of 900 home fires per year are started when oily rags catch fire. Also, an average of 1,700 home fires are caused by instances of spontaneous combustion or chemical reactions. As the video cleverly communicates, preventing this is as simple as drying rags outside, dunking in a container with water and detergent solution and disposing.

“We are very appreciative that Wilmette Fire Department put their trust in us to work with them to research why homes in the Wilmette community were experiencing events of spontaneous combustion. It is our hope that we can spread the word to homeowners and the fire service through knowledge and education to prevent further damage to property, and potentially save lives as well,” said Chris Hasbrook, vice president and general manager of UL’s Building and Life Safety Technologies division.

The public is encouraged to view the videos and the safety information on [UL's website](#) and tell family, friends and neighbors about these risks and the steps they can take to prevent fires from spontaneous combustion.

Video links:

Public Service Announcement www.ul.com/news/dry-dunk-dispose-safely-treat-oil-soaked-rags

Demonstration video www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3egLXI8G4k&feature=youtu.be

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