



Reusable Kitchen Towels

Kitchen towels serve multiple purposes in restaurants and cooking operations. They are often used to help handle hot dishes, to soak up spills, to wipe up splattered foods, for drying hands, and for heavy-duty cleaning such as wiping grease build-up. It is not uncommon to find a pile of dirty towels at the end of the day. However, if not stored or handled properly, towels covered in cooking grease could auto-ignite and start a fire without an external heat source.

As greasy towels begin to dry, heat is produced. If they're thrown into a pile, oxygen is trapped underneath. The combination of heat, oxygen, and oil-soaked fabric can lead to spontaneous combustion, resulting in a fire that could spread and cause significant damage to the property and equipment. Luckily, the risk of fire can be decreased by following safe handling procedures, proper storage, and proper disposal or cleaning practices.

Listed below are some tips for storing and handling greasy towels:

- Never store greasy towels in a pile. Used towels should be:
 - Spread out in a safe, flat area to dry. The surrounding area should be kept free of clutter and other materials that could potentially help fuel and spread a fire.
 - Or
 - Stored in an FM approved, non-combustible metal container with a lid, and filled with a solution of water and an oil breakdown detergent. If you plan to reuse the towels, this step is critical.
- Never dispose of greasy towels in a normal trash bin. Arrange a special pickup by a local waste removal service.
- Utilize a professional laundering service to ensure thorough cleaning, safe handling, and drying. Towels can retain grease even after being washed, and the heat from a drying machine increases the risk of fire.

To prevent fires, it's essential to recognize the risk of self-heating and spontaneous combustion in greasy towels and to follow proper guidelines for safe storage, cleaning, and disposal.

For more information regarding recommended practices for handling greasy towels, and other fire prevention guidelines, please contact Acadia's Virtual Loss Control Team at virtuallc@acadia-ins.com or 207-874-5701.

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