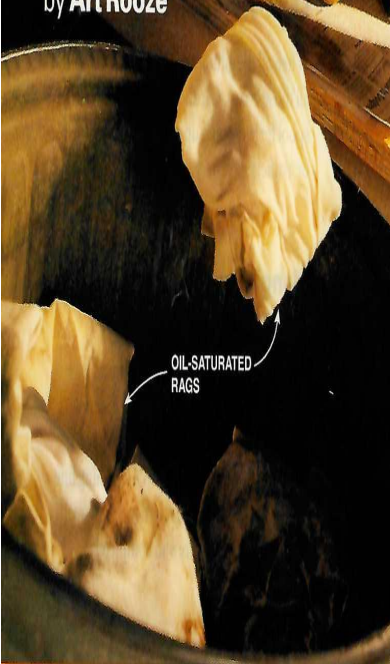


# Spontaneous Combustion

Oil-soaked rags can burn your house down—or worse!

by Art Rooze



**THIS is an invitation to disaster! Do not throw wadded-up, saturated rags used to apply oil finish or oil stain in the trash.**



**WADDED-UP, oil-soaked rags begin to smoke and smolder.**



**RAGS spontaneously ignite.**



**IGNITED rags quickly grow to full flame.**



**OPEN up oil-soaked rags and hang them up until they're completely dry. Then dispose of them in the trash.**

Oil finishes that you put on with a rag, used for a hundred years or more, are as popular as ever. They're known generically as Danish oil, antique oil or finishing oil. Sometimes they come mixed with a stain. They're quick and simple to use and they look good. And with the new hardeners developed in recent years, they're an extremely durable and low-maintenance finish for furniture or woodwork.

But if you're not careful with those oil-soaked rags, you can burn your house down. This isn't just superstition; it

can actually happen: If you ball up these oil-soaked rags and throw them away, or if they get compressed in a trash barrel, they can begin to smoke, then burst into flame—all by themselves, just as our photos show.

Here's why spontaneous combustion can occur: As the oil dries and changes from liquid to solid, it absorbs oxygen. This oxygen absorption process generates heat, which ordinarily dissipates harmlessly into the air. However, when this heat is trapped within a wad of oil-soaked

rags, the heat feeds on itself until the rags ignite.

**How to avoid danger:** It's simple. Just don't ball up your oily rags. Spread them out to dry across a sawhorse, the rungs of a ladder, a fence or on the floor of your shop. Oily rags can't generate serious heat when they're spread out. When the rags are thoroughly dry—it may take a few days—they'll become stiff. Then you can safely throw them in the trash. 🏠

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