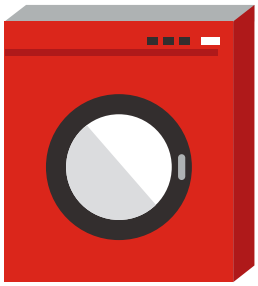
WORKING TOGETHER TO MANAGE BUSINESS RISK

Laundry & Spontaneous Ignition

The low-down on laundry fires

It might surprise you to know that one of the most common causes of laundry fires is spontaneous ignition. These fires are caused by a chemical process called oxidisation which creates increasingly intense heat until the item catches fire — even if they're just warm or damp.



Some typical causes of laundry fires are:

- Cotton fabrics with even small amounts of residual vegetable oils, such as cleaning rags, dish cloths, towels or aprons
- Warm or damp laundry items being stored in a warm area
- Exposure to heat sources like hot pipes or tumble dryers
- Lack of ventilation for folded laundry
- Exposure to direct sunlight
- Detergents that contain oxidising chemicals.

Hot tips to avoid fires

Wash dirty items on the right setting

Cold washes aren't as effective on oil residues, so you're better off using a more thorough hot-water wash setting to get rid of as much oil and fat as possible. Always rinse before drying too.

Give your equipment a health check

Always go by the manufacturer's instructions — and make maintenance a regular habit.

Let it breathe

Proper ventilation is essential for your tumble dryer. Make sure the exhaust vents are clear.

Avoid heat sources

Don't store dirty laundry items near a heat source or in direct sunlight. And don't put things like foam rubber, waterproof materials, shower caps, mop heads and oily rags in the tumble dryer for example — pop them on the line instead.

Keep your dryer company

Don't leave a tumble dryer on its own — make sure someone's around to keep an eye on it.

Stay cool

Let your tumble dryer go through the entire cool down cycle — it's removes much of the heat that's built up during the process. It's good for the machine and the items too.

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Get the right firefighting gear

You should always have a dry powder fire extinguisher handy in case of an unexpected emergency. But make sure you've got the right one for the job. As a general rule for premises with a floor area under:

- **300m²:** One 3A rated dry powder extinguisher (1 x 2.7 kg unit)
- **600m²:** Two 3A rated dry powder extinguisher (2 x 2.7 kg units)
- **Over 600m²:** 1 x 3A rated dry powder extinguisher per 300m² or 1 x 4A (4.5kg apx) per 450m² of floor area.

Either way, make sure they're serviced once a year and maintained regularly by a member of the Fire Protection Association of New Zealand (FPANZ).

Catch it early

The earlier a fire is detected the better. Fires start small and can spread quickly, so alarms can save lots of time – and damage. Your best option is to fit an alarm that complies to NZS 4512:2010. Heat and smoke detectors linked to a monitored intruder alarm system can also be a great add-on option.

Visit **vero.co.nz/risk-profiler** to check out our other risk guides for more tips and in-depth information about managing risk.

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