



PRESS RELEASE
Moraga-Orinda Fire District
Structure Fire in Orinda Woods Area

Moraga-Orinda Fire District
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Release Date: June 1, 2013

Orinda - At 4:00 AM on Saturday, June 1, 2013, units from the Moraga-Orinda Fire District responded to a report of a structure fire in the Orinda Woods area of Orinda. The resident's adult son awakened to the sound of the home's fire alarm. He was able to alert the two other sleeping adults and all three escaped the house without injury. The first arriving engine found the attic heavily involved with fire. Firefighters made entry and were able to get water on the fire by approximately 4:10 AM. Moraga-Orinda Fire District and Contra Costa Fire District responded with six fire engines, one truck and two Chief Officers. Twenty-four firefighters contained the fire to the attic and exterior of the garage area. There were no injuries reported and the fire was contained at 4:35 AM.

The fire was caused by spontaneous combustion of oily rags. All fires, including those ignited "spontaneously," require three elements: fuel, oxygen and a source of heat. Normally, we think of a source of heat as something with a flame. There is no flaming ignition with spontaneous combustion. Rather, when flammable finishes like linseed or tung oil are applied to a rag, heat develops.

When these same rags are bunched up and piled on top of each other, heat can build to a point where it ignites this already flammable material. No matches, torches or burning cigarettes required. It's a relatively simple process of oil oxidizing, which generates heat. If other combustible material is nearby it can quickly develop into a full-raging fire.

Preventing spontaneous combustion from occurring is as simple as practicing a little routine housekeeping. Anytime you have an oily rag left over after some wood-finishing or other project, hang it up to dry, preferably outdoors. You can use a clothesline or a fence, but just be sure to hang each rag by itself. Don't pile them on top of each other. If you need to hang them indoors, keep them away from heat sources such as water heaters or furnaces.