Safe Storage And Disposal Of Oil Or Solvent-soaked Rags Fatality File

Incident Description

Equipment was being installed in a lab when a flammable storage cabinet was inadvertently bumped, causing a partially full 4-liter solvent waste bottle inside the cabinet to be knocked over. The bottle broke and spilled organic solvents within the chemical storage cabinet and on the floor.

Methanol, chloroform, acetonitrile, and ethyl acetate made up the bulk of the contents of the bottle. The lab cleaned up as much of the spill as possible from the floor and in the cabinet using absorbent pads. They left a few additional absorbent pads in the cabinet to soak up the remaining spill. They then placed the soaked pads in the garbage can, closed the plastic garbage bag, left the room, and called the Fire Department to report the spill.

The Fire Department contacted EH&S and the Industrial Hygiene (IH) team responded to the scene. Their instruments did not detect any volatile organic compounds (VOCs) at the doors to the hallway or the room adjacent to the lab, indicating that the solvent vapors associated with the spill had been contained to the room. All labs should have negative airflow (air flowing inward from hallway) in order to contain vapors and odors and, in this case, the negative airflow functioned as intended to minimize impact to the surrounding area.