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Subject: Blue Alert: Misuse of Microwave Oven

Title: Sweatshirts and Microwaves Don't Mix

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Lessons Learned Statement: Misuse of microwave ovens can have undesirable results.

Discussion of Activities: After being caught in a thunderstorm last summer, an employee decided to dry out a wet sweatshirt in a microwave located in a lunchroom. After heating the sweatshirt for one minute, it felt warm and a bit drier. The timer then was set for 5 minutes and the employee left the room. The cotton/acrylic fabric began to smolder, emitting a foul-smelling smoke which promptly cleared the lunch room and hallway. Both the microwave and the smoldering remains of the sweatshirt were placed in a hood to exhaust the fumes, however, the smell had permeated throughout the four-story building and could have triggered a fire alarm (during a heavy downpour).

Analysis: The most serious lesson learned here is that unattended operation and misuse of a microwave could have caused a fire and building evacuation.

Recommended Actions: Do not leave microwave ovens unattended while in use. Set the time appropriately. Only utensils designed for the purpose should be used in a microwave.

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