

## Preventing Fires on Your Farm

### By Sharon Scofield

October 3-9, 2004 is Fire Prevention Week. This event is sponsored each year by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and has its origins in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. Legend tells us that this fire started in the O'Leary barn when a cow kicked over a lamp during milking. The lamp set the barn on fire, burned more than 2000 acres in 27 hours, killed some 300 people, left 100,000 homeless and destroyed more than 17,000 structures. Farms today do not use lamps as in 1871; however, there are still fire hazards present.

Farm fires can result from poor housekeeping, faulty electrical equipment, overloaded circuits, chemical reactions, smoking in non-smoking areas, or discarding cigarette butts improperly. Highly flammable/combustible materials, accelerants or ignition sources are also potential sources of farm fires. Highly flammable or combustible materials include: hay/straw, bedding material, cobwebs, dust, grain dust, paint, fertilizer and pesticides/herbicides. Accelerants - which increase the speed at which a fire spreads - include; gasoline, kerosene, oil or aerosol cans. Ignition sources include: cigarettes, sparks from machines, motors, heaters, electrical appliances, fence chargers, electrical fixtures/wires, batteries, broken glass or chemicals that react with each other or with water/dampness.

Below are some suggestions to keep your farm safe from fire hazards –

- Take time to inspect your farmstead – looking for highly flammable/combustible materials, accelerants, or ignition sources.
- Work with your local fire department for suggestions on making your farm more fire-safe and fireproof. Install fire or smoke alarms. Change the batteries and test your fire or smoke alarms every six months.
- Conduct regular fire drills so all family members and employees know what to do in the event of a fire. Review the location of all telephones, emergency exits and fire extinguishers.
- Know how to contact the local fire department in an emergency. Post emergency telephone numbers at each phone, along with directions to your farm.
- Good Housekeeping - Include good housekeeping as part of your daily routine. Keep work areas clean, dry and clear. Take care of trash, oily rags, dust or other combustible materials. Check ducts, airshafts, engines and gears for dust and debris.
- Electrical Safety - Use the [National Electrical Code](#) as your guide for checking your electrical systems so they are not overloaded. Look for exposed wires, broken insulation, improper grounding on all wiring, electrical motors, heating devices, etc before each use. Clean and oil motors (if necessary) each season.
- Chemical Safety - Check gas and fuel oil systems for leaks and unsafe conditions. Store flammable liquids in labeled safety containers and store them in approved flammable-liquid safety cabinets. Follow the directions on containers of fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides for the best method of storage to avoid a fire.

- Smoking – Only allow smoking in designated areas. Discard cigarette butts and matches in appropriate containers after they are properly extinguished.

If you would like more information or wish to schedule an on-farm safety survey, contact Jim Carrabba, Agricultural Safety Specialist at NYCAMH. His number is 800-343-7527 ext 239 or his e-mail is [jcarrabba@nycamh.com](mailto:jcarrabba@nycamh.com). A program of Bassett Healthcare Network, NYCAMH's mission is enhancing agricultural and rural health by preventing and treating occupational injury and illness.