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Farm and Ranch Fire Safety Checklist

Nearly 7,500 people die from fires each year in the United States. Another 310,000 people are injured by fire and may spend months or years in hospitals recovering from burns.

The fire problem is even greater for the one-third of the nation's population living on farms, ranches, and in rural areas. The hard facts remain that:

- National fatality rates from fires for rural people are double the rates for urban residents. (Nonwhite rural residents have an even higher fatality rate.)
- Property damage from fire is three to six times greater in rural communities.
- Response time of fire fighting equipment to rural fires is often 15 to 30 minutes—sometimes longer. (It takes only 5 minutes for some fires to develop deadly conditions and 20 minutes to rage into a major blaze.)

If you live on a farm or ranch you can assume some responsibility for eliminating these fire hazards. If you have questions about rural fire safety, call on the nearest rural fire department officials for help. Fire officials can offer many tips and advice on how to make your farm or ranch more fire-safe. This fire safety checklist can also help you become aware of rural fire hazards and find ways to remove them.



Rural Buildings and Structures

Yes No

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| () () | 1. Are weeds, grass, and other vegetation kept mowed, plowed, or chemically controlled at least 50-100 feet around all buildings? | () () | 7. Are electrical connection boxes protected from water and dirt? |
| () () | 2. Do buildings where fire hazards are present have adequate fire walls of 5/8-inch sheet rock? | () () | 8. Are electrical hazards such as freely hanging electrical cords, bare light bulbs, cords wrapped around nails, or loosely strung extension cords avoided? |
| () () | 3. Is firefighter access available for all buildings? | () () | 9. Do all electrical circuits have adequate-sized fuses or circuit breakers? |
| () () | 4. Are adequate escape routes available for employees and livestock in all out-buildings? | () () | 10. Is welding done in an open, clean area—preferably on a cement floor or a metal or brickwork table—with adequate fire extinguishers available? |
| () () | 5. Do all structures have lightning rods installed? | () () | 11. Are auxiliary heating systems, like wood stoves or oil and gas burners, installed with proper clearances on noncombustible floors? |
| () () | 6. Has electrical wiring for all facilities been inspected recently by a qualified electrician? | () () | 12. Do heating systems receive periodic cleaning? |

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- () () 13. Are combustibles kept a safe distance from electric baseboard and portable heaters?
- () () 14. When using heat lamps around animals, is chain wire rope used to suspend lamps, with a porcelain lamp receptacle, and a wire bail to protect animal bedding from fire in case the lamp should fall?
- () () 15. Is care taken to assure that heat tape is never overlapped when used to prevent water pipe freeze-ups?
- () () 16. Are agricultural dryers kept clean, lubricated, and monitored for hot spots?
- () () 17. Are oil-soaked rags disposed of in metal containers?
- () () 18. Are fires in silos and hay storage buildings prevented by monitoring the moisture content of the stored material?
- () () 19. Do grain storage areas receive proper clean-up and enforcement of no smoking rules to minimize dust and to prevent explosions and fires?

Hazardous Materials

Yes No

- () () 1. Are no smoking areas around fuel and hay storage clearly marked?
- () () 2. Are weeds, dry grass, and brush kept trimmed from around fuel storage tanks?
- () () 3. Are electrical pumps grounded?
- () () 4. Is an outside building used for the storage of pesticides, fertilizers, and other flammables?
- () () 5. Are composted and decomposing organic materials stored in an open area where flammable methane gas can be vented?
- () () 6. Have liquid petroleum tanks been properly sited away from structures—preferably in bunkered ground?

Special Hazards

Yes No

- () () 1. Are all vehicles and machinery equipped with adequate-sized fire extinguishers?
- () () 2. Do pump houses, barns, sheds, etc. have fire extinguishers available for emergency use with signs indicating their location?

- () () 3. Are conveyor belts checked for lubrication residue, static electricity, and friction?
- () () 4. If electrical power lines pass through forested areas, are they kept free of tree limbs and brush?
- () () 5. Are vehicles with catalytic mufflers kept away from dry grass and stubble fields?
- () () 6. Is grass trimmed around electric fences, and are other precautions followed such as using "on/off" controllers, avoiding high current, and protecting control boxes through enclosure?

Combustible Material

Yes No

- () () 1. Are rubbish and trash promptly disposed of and not allowed to accumulate and become a fire hazard?
- () () 2. Are grain elevators and feed mills kept clean and properly vented to minimize dust and avoid explosions and fires?
- () () 3. Have discarded materials like used fuel oil, or chemical, paint, or pesticide/herbicide containers been removed?
- () () 4. Are other combustible materials like hay, feed, and firewood properly stored away from the home where they do not present a fire hazard?

Recreation Areas

Yes No

- () () 1. Where camping is allowed, have fire-safe sites been established with fire-place rings, grills, and trash bins, and are trees, brush, and grass kept trimmed to provide fire breaks?
- () () 2. Is fire vehicle access available to recreation sites in case fires do occur?
- () () 3. Are proper fuel storage and filling facilities available for recreational boating?

Fire Control

Yes No

- () () 1. Are emergency phones clearly identified, with signs that include fire department numbers and an exact location description of the farm or ranch?

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- () () 2. Is access for fire fighting vehicles available, considering road width, bridge strength, turnarounds, grades, and other obstructions (tree limbs, buildings, fences, locked gates, etc.)?
- () () 3. Do adequate fire fighting water supplies exist, like charged water hose, ponds, and irrigation ditches?
- () () 4. Do you have on-site water hose couplings compatible with the local fire departments?
- () () 5. Is a smoke and fire alarm system available for all valued structures, like residences, barns, stock buildings, and garages?
- () () 6. Are fire extinguishers available for all buildings and equipment?
- () () 7. Is controlled burning of fields, rubbish, trash, etc. done according to local regulations, and is the fire department notified for standby response?
- () () 8. In isolated rural areas, is adequate and properly operational on-site fire suppression equipment available?
- () () 9. Has a rural addressing system been established in your community so the local fire department can be promptly notified as to the exact location of a fire or emergency when it does occur?

Completing this checklist shows your concern for the fire safety of your farm or ranch. Each "no" answer indicates a potential hazard, and you should give immediate consideration to correcting the problem. A small investment now to correct the situation may pay large dividends in preventing a very costly fire later.

Fire safety is an investment for the valuable items on your farm or ranch. While insurance coverage is available, many possessions are not replaceable, and an injury or death caused by fire is not reversible. A fire can also seriously disrupt the timely operation of your farm or ranch and cause a great deal of economic hardship.

This checklist was prepared by William J. Rompa, formerly State Extension Agent, Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Oregon State University.

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