**Hardin County Extension News Release**

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**Field Fires a Concern for Farmers and Neighbors**

*Hardin County* - This season, farmers are at a high risk of having a field fire. In the past couple of weeks, there have been several field fires in area counties.

What is fueling these fires you may ask? We had a tremendous amount of rain this past growing season, which in turn produced a corn crop with a lot of fodder. We also have had a very dry harvest season this fall. Add in high winds, a discarded cigarette or a blowing ember from a trash fire and you have the opportunity for a major field fire.

Field fires can grow out of control in a matter of minutes. Adjacent homes, buildings and standing crops all are at risk.

Additionally the conditions present during harvest season include dry plant material and grain dust that are highly combustible. Hot equipment or engine sparks are great ignition sources. It is not uncommon for exhaust pipes or catalytic converters to exceed 1,000°F. Add a little wind and there is a perfect opportunity for a field fire.

Fighting a field fire can be quite the challenge and should be directed by the fire department in charge. You may be of assistance if you have a tillage tool ready to go to “plow” a barrier. When plowing the barrier you do not want to attempt to till the ground at the fire. You would want to keep a safe distance between the fire and your tractor. Directly tilling the ground at the fire may result in severe damage to the tractor and a risk to the operator.

Being prepared to handle field fires is important for all workers and transport drivers. Combines, tractors, grain trucks, and pick-ups should all be equipped with a trustworthy fire extinguisher as the first lines of defense. Combines should carry an ABC 10-pound fire extinguisher in the cab and a larger 20-pound unit at the ground level. Tractors and trucks are recommended to have a 5-pound minimum extinguisher available. These extinguishers should be in EACH vehicle in the field. Nothing is worse than watching the combine go up in flames while you’re running to the end of the field to retrieve the fire extinguisher on the grain cart.

Having an extinguisher on each piece of equipment ensures you will be ready to react on the first signs of smoke.
Don't get caught with a false sense of security.

If you follow the recommendations and own enough fire extinguishers, then you must also follow the maintenance recommendations. Check the pressure gages periodically, making sure the needle remains in the "charged" zone. If a unit has been partially discharged, it must be fully recharged before using it again. Even a slight discharge can create a gap in the internal seal of the extinguisher valve, causing the pressure to leak out. The pressure needle may linger in the charged zone; however there may not be adequate pressure to expel the contents.

Extinguishers could use a little shake a few times a year. By inverting the extinguisher and shaking it several times each season makes sure the powder doesn’t get lodged at the bottom of the unit. Equipment vibrations are notorious for compacting the reactive ingredients of fire extinguishers; making them worthless when they are needed.

Extinguishers should also be inspected periodically by a fire professional. Fire service companies can be found in community directories. Your local fire department or insurance company can also point you in the right direction for service companies. Some extinguishers are not designed to be refilled, or are too old to be refilled. These units should be replaced when they expire. Having these old extinguishers around does no good when the time comes to pull the pin.

Follow other fire prevention practices.

It is also important to keep machinery in good repair. Apply grease to bearings and oil chains regularly to reduce friction. It is recommended to perform maintenance checks at the end of the day, rather than at the beginning, to detect any hot smoldering areas that may break out into flames overnight.

Keep machinery clean and free from plant materials, especially around the wrap points. Wipe up any fuel or oil leaks to eliminate additional fuel sources; and do not leave oily rags on equipment or in the cab.

Use an air compressor or leaf blower to remove crop residue, and a pressure washer to remove built up oil or caked-on grease.

Take time to cool down the equipment each night, and check for any hot spots. These steps can make a difference to save equipment, facilities, commodities, and lives.

Being prepared to handle field fires is important for all workers. Having machinery equipped with a trustworthy fire extinguisher is one of the first lines of defense.

*(Written by Sam Custer, OSU Extension – Darke County, Edited by Mark Badertscher – Hardin County)*