

Fire safety on farm

Purpose:

To promote the safety of farm workers, owners, animals and anyone working on a farm or horticultural site during the incidence of a fire and to understand what to do during a fire emergency.

Why:

To minimise the risk of injury or death to workers and animals and devastation to buildings, crops, machinery, and the environment.

TIAH Capability Framework area:

This aligns with the knowledge and skills in the Health and Safety area.

<https://tiah.org/tiah-capability-framework>

Talk leader instructions:

- Prepare to do the talk in a suitable/quiet location with no distractions
- Consider using some of the resources as part of the talk, e.g. showing a video
- Engage with participants, ask questions and give everyday examples
- Conclude with a brief review
- Get everyone to sign the form. Make sure to write the name of the farm and the date. Keep a copy in your Health and Safety records
- Ensure all participants have access to a copy of this document to refer to once the session has finished. This could be electronic and emailed or printed

Notes:

Background

Fires on farms pose a significant threat to life. They can be extremely frightening and cause loss to livestock, buildings, crops, machinery, and wildlife, as well as causing devastation to the environment and businesses.

In 2023, Georgina Lamb, Senior Partnerships Manager at The Farming Community Network (FCN), was woken to find that a huge fire had ripped through the barn of the family farm, causing losses and damage to machinery, the barn, and all its contents including all stored bales.



“The horror, devastation and feeling of complete hopelessness is so upsetting. Our farm is our home as well as our business, so the fire affected every part of our lives for a long time.” Georgina Lamb.

With temperatures rising and summers set to become hotter in future years, all necessary measures should be taken to reduce the risk of fire. This includes a fire safety strategy and having plans in place, including evacuation plans for people and livestock, should there be a fire emergency,

Your manager or the farm owner may also discuss prevention and emergency measures with the local fire service to ensure these are suitable and practical.

According to the NFU Mutual, farm fires increased by over 20% in 2022 with an additional 1,800 fires reported from 2021 and insurance claims amounting to £85.3 million.



Important: Know what to do if a fire breaks out. If you're unsure, ask your manager.

Your manager, owner or anyone in control of the premises is responsible for fire safety on the farm. However, it's your responsibility to attend any training or follow any instructions.

Optional: Watch this YouTube video (7 minutes) from farmer Joe Seels as he's called to a fire in one of his barns caused by a suspected arson attack.

Joe highlights the challenges of evacuating his cattle in the dark as the fire service struggles to gain access to enough water to extinguish the blaze.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AfAMkKoAXpU>



Find out more about fire safety on your farm by contacting your local Fire and Rescue Service.

<https://nfcc.org.uk/contacts/fire-and-rescue-services/>

Notes:

Main learning points



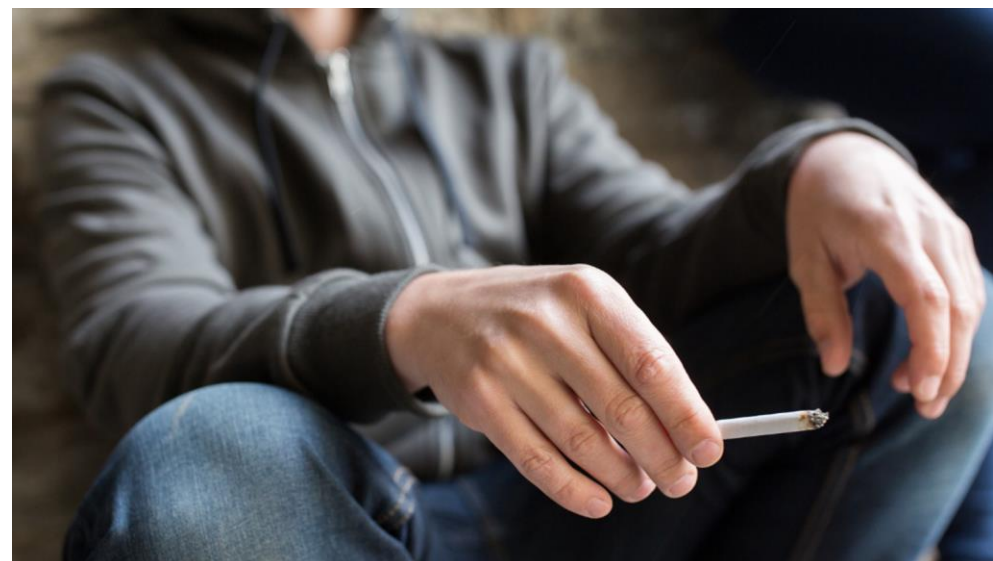
Common causes of fires on farm

Q: There are a number of common causes of fire on farms. What do you think these could be, and what can be done to help reduce the risk?

Responses might include:

1. Farm vehicles and machinery fires
 - Keep vehicles and machinery well-maintained and serviced regularly
 - Keep them free from hay, straw, oil and grease
2. Hay fires
 - Remove hay and straw from fields as soon as possible after harvest
 - Ensure it's dry before storing to prevent spontaneous combustion
 - Store away from other buildings, especially those containing fuels or chemicals
 - Separate straw and hay storage away from livestock
3. Fires caused by sparks from welding or grinding (hot work)
 - Only carry out hot work in clean areas well away from flammable substances and buildings used to store hay/straw – Remember, one spark is all it takes to start a fire
4. Electrical faults causing fires
 - Never leave anything running or switched on unnecessarily
 - Ensure regular electrical safety checks are carried out
5. Wildfires and fires from human causes
 - Only smoke in designated areas and well away from combustible materials
 - Ensure cigarettes and matches are extinguished properly
 - Open fires and barbeques also pose a high risk. If you have camping or picnicking facilities on the farm, ensure this is only allowed in controlled areas
6. Fires involving fuel and hazardous materials
 - Ensure any fuels, fertilisers, chemicals and any other hazardous materials or substances are stored securely and are labelled clearly
 - Only store what you need to and well away from other buildings
 - Make sure you've completed your COSHH assessment:
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/topics/coshh.htm>

Farms are particularly vulnerable to arson attacks due to isolated locations, open boundaries and readily ignitable material, such as hay or straw. Therefore, it's advised that all farms complete a general risk assessment to identify areas where the arsonist might attack.



More information on this can be found in the NFU Mutual – **Risk Management Programme for Prevention of Fires on Farms:**
<https://www.nfumutual.co.uk/globalassets/business/rms/documents/risk-management-programme-for-prevention-of-fires-on-farms.pdf>

Notes:

Suggestions/ ideas:

Discussion points



10 minutes

Q: What can be done in advance to prepare for a fire?

Responses might include:

- Ensure you have an up-to-date fire risk assessment to identify potential risks on the farm. Find out more on the GOV.UK website <https://www.gov.uk/search/all?keywords=fire+risk+assessment&order=relevance>
- Keep escape routes clear at all times
- Make sure you know what to do in the event of a fire and where the fire meeting point is
- Have your mobile phone with you and charged at all times, especially if working alone
- Ensure all areas around the farm are free from rubbish, especially combustible materials such as oily rags
- Store fertiliser in a clean environment where it cannot be contaminated
- Try to keep fertiliser stores away from other flammable materials
- Make stores as secure as possible – if you suspect theft, report it to the Police immediately - Any fertiliser not required for programmed use should be evaluated as to whether it is necessary to keep
- Keep firefighting equipment in good working order and ensure it's serviced regularly. Do you know where it's located? If unsure, check with your manager
- Farm entrances should be signposted, and all access routes kept clear for emergency vehicles
- Download a location app such as What3words: <https://what3words.com/products/what3words-app> or Ordnance Survey Locate: <https://shop.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/maps/os-maps-subscriptions/> so that you can give a specific location to the emergency services.

Q: What would you do if there was a fire on your farm?

Responses might include:

- Get to a safe place away from the fire, such as a designated fire meeting point
- If you're in a smoke-filled building – stay low during your escape as smoke rises
- Call 999 and inform your manager or the farm owner immediately
- Stay away from the fire
- Once everyone is safe – prepare to evacuate livestock should the fire spread. Make sure you know what the evacuation process is. This will be outlined in the farm livestock evacuation plan in the event of a fire
- Prepare to use farm machinery to assist the fire and rescue services to move straw or hay
- Prepare to help the fire and rescue services to access on-farm water supplies

Q: What can be done to help prevent arson at the farm?

Responses might include:

- Lock sheds and buildings
- Keep fuels, chemicals, pesticides, and fertilisers locked away
- Hay and straw should be removed from fields as soon as possible after harvesting
- Repair or replace damaged fencing and gates
- Display security notices
- Use security alarms, CCTV and additional lighting
- Use dogs or geese to give early warning of intruders
- Be vigilant - tell your manager if you notice someone on the farm that you don't recognise
- Tell your manager if you notice anything suspicious – for example, doors that shouldn't be unlocked. Fertiliser, fuel or chemicals missing

Farm fires can spread at an alarming speed and put lives at risk. Therefore, it’s crucial that all agricultural and horticultural businesses ensure that they take every measure to help reduce the risk of a fire and have an effective plan in place should there be a fire emergency.

Resources:
NFU: Fire safety – 5 practical tips for preventing fires on farm:
<https://www.dsfire.gov.uk/safety/businesses/fire-safety-farms>
NFU Mutual: Risk Management Programme for Prevention of Fires on Farms:
<https://www.nfumutual.co.uk/globalassets/business/rms/documents/risk-management-programme-for-prevention-of-fires-on-farms.pdf>
GOV.UK: Farm Fires – Protecting farm animal welfare:
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a79b702e5274a18ba50e4c4/pb9326-farm-fires.pdf>
National Emergencies Trust: Wildfires in the UK: Understanding the Growing Risk:
<https://nationalemergienciestrust.org.uk/wildfires-growing-risk/>
National Fire Chiefs Council: Wildfire Aware Prevention Advice:
<https://nfcc.org.uk/our-services/campaigns/wildfire-aware/wildfire-prevention-advice>
NFU: How to help the fire service access on-farm water supplies:
<https://www.nfuonline.com/updates-and-information/how-to-help-the-fire-service-access-on-farm-water-supplies/>
NFU: How to prevent combine fires during harvest time:
<https://www.nfuonline.com/updates-and-information/how-to-prevent-farm-fires-during-harvest-time/>
Humberside Fire & Rescue Service: Fire safety on the farm:
<https://humbersidefire.gov.uk/your-safety/business-safety/fire-safety-on-the-farm>

Toolbox Talk participants

Toolbox Talk: **Fire safety on farm**

Name of farmDate

Talk leader name.....

Name	Signature	Date