

"Fire in the Field!"

Plan ahead to be prepared.

Fire! Probably no word generates more fear. That's especially true in forage fields, where an errant spark can quickly wipe out a crop along with equipment that may also be in the field.

Field fires cause more than \$20 million in equipment losses each year, not counting crop losses resulting from down time and personal injury.

Generally, not only does equipment become part of the loss in a field fire—it's often the source of the fire. In most cases, this is due to carelessness on the part of the operator.

Equipment is designed and engineered to protect against being the source of a fire. However, sparks from a faulty exhaust system as well as grease or oil buildup around the engine can greatly increase the chance of a fire.

Here are some tips to help prevent a fire in the field:

- ▶ Keep equipment clean. Remove dust, plant debris and trash from each piece of equipment daily, or more often if conditions warrant. Pay special attention to the engine and engine compartment, since about 75% of all equipment fires start in this area.
- ▶ Pay close attention to your machine operator's manual, and be sure to follow all instructions and schedules for lubrication and routine maintenance. If you notice any leaking fuel or oil hoses, fittings or metal lines, replace or repair them immediately.
- ▶ Equipment fires can be caused by several heat sources. The most common is exhaust system surfaces that contact any flammable material. Make sure your exhaust system including the manifold, muffler and turbocharger are in good condition and free of leaks.
- ▶ Inspect machines regularly for worn or damaged electrical components and wiring. You should replace any worn or malfunctioning electrical components with parts from your dealer. If your machine is blowing fuses or has a circuit



A fire extinguisher is your best form of protection against fire losses in the field.

that intermittently cuts out, find and repair the cause. Arcing electrical wires generate extremely high temperatures.

- ▶ Clean up spilled fuel and oil.
- ▶ Perform routine maintenance to keep machines and hay tools in top working condition and to reduce friction among

moving components. A badly worn bearing can glow red hot. Any rubber belt subjected to intense heat from a worn part can burst into flames.

- ▶ Equip each tractor, swather and baler with a fully charged ABC dry chemical fire extinguisher (10-pound minimum).

Be Prepared

Despite your best intentions and good maintenance, a field fire can still occur. Your best source of protection is to make sure every tractor, self-propelled swather and hay baler is equipped with a fully charged 10-pound ABC dry chemical fire extinguisher. Select only extinguishers that carry the Underwriter's Laboratory approval. Having two extinguishers on the machine is even better, in case one malfunctions or loses pressure. For tractors and self-propelled swathers, keep one mounted in the cab and one where it can be reached from the ground.

Check your extinguishers regularly, paying special attention to the pressure gauge. To function effectively, the gauge must show adequate pressure to expel the powder inside. Once an extinguisher has been even partially discharged, get it fully recharged before placing it back in service. During even a brief discharge, the tiny dry chemical particles will create a small gap in the internal seal of the extinguisher valve. This tiny opening will allow any remaining pressure to leak out in a few hours or days.

Keep a cell phone or two-way radio with each tractor or self-propelled swather so that you can summon help quickly.