

# Building insulation may be lurking fire hazard

LERAYSVILLE — Farmers, seeking to take advantage of every form of energy savings, may be unknowingly trading one type of costly practice for another that can

prove to be much more expensive. The cost factor involves efforts to insulate and seal barns, storage or other farm buildings and reduce operational costs.

But both insulation industry and safety experts stress that the insulation must be installed properly or it can be a dangerous and costly fire hazard in farm buildings.

"If farmers use insulation without the proper thermal barrier protection in machinery sheds or livestock buildings, a potential fire hazard exists," according to Dennis Murphy, Extension safety specialist at Penn State.

"In a livestock shed, even if the flames or fire do not reach the animals, they may die from the toxic fumes which are given off from the burning insulation."

Earlier this year, Bradford County dairy farmer and Holstein breeder, Archie Williams, of LeRaysville, suffered a fire with losses totaling nearly three-quarters of a million dollars.

Some 160 head of milkers and young stock were lost in the blaze, in which polyurethane sealer is believed to have played a role.

"When we built the latest barn addition back in 1972, we used a polyurethane sealer to comply with regulations. At that time it was the thing to use. I think it was the polyurethane which caused the fire to spread so rapidly."

The Williams received an insurance claim of \$441,717.98, the largest ever paid in the history of Old Guard Insurance Company, but it was still more than \$300,000 below total losses.

The Urethane Foam Contractors Association, an international trade association of 1,500 polyurethane foam contractors and suppliers, has appealed to farmers nationwide not to violate accepted fire safety standards in use of the foam insulation.

"Sprayed polyurethane foam is

combustible," said Vernon Lowe, executive vice-president of the UCFA.

"Like other combustible building materials it has to be used in accordance with appropriate safety guidelines, which are defined in all of the national model building codes. Improper installation and failure to use a thermal barrier can create a fire hazard."

At this year's Ag Progress Days at Penn State Aug. 25-27, farmers will have the opportunity to witness the fire dangers of various insulations.

Safety Extension specialist Murphy will demonstrate the burning characteristics of various insulations and the ways to install them properly to protect against fire hazard.

Many rigid insulations have been advertised as nonflammable or self-extinguishing, but controversy

has arisen over the validity of these claims, says Murphy.

The risk of fire can be minimized if the insulation is properly covered — keeping the air from getting to the insulation in the event of fire, he explained.

The insulation should be covered with some nonflammable material, such as drywall, sheetrock, gypsum board or some similar material.

Building codes require a covering material that gives at least 15 minutes of protection against fire. However, many rural and agricultural areas are exempt from fire codes, said Murphy.

The fire safety demonstrations will be conducted in the morning and afternoon on Tuesday and Wednesday of Ag Progress Days, which are held at the Rock Springs Agricultural Research Center, located nine miles west of State College on Route 45.



Fire insurance claim of \$441,717.98 is paid to Mr. and Mrs. Archie Williams, right, of LeRaysville, Bradford County, by Robert Yoder, left, Claims Manager of Old Guard Manager, and Tim Franklin, Wysox Insurance Agent. Silos behind the group are all that remained of large dairy complex and 160-head herd destroyed in fire.

## USDA

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regulatory personnel," Marxman says. "It gives USDA warehouse examiners necessary information that aids in completing their examinations."

Finally, the task force identified a need for more information about

elevator bankruptcies. Suggested: a national clearinghouse for the study of elevator failures. Part of it could be based at USDA to monitor grain elevators and help track emerging problems.

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