

Fires in treated hay mows are potential death traps

NEW HOLLAND — The use of chemical preservatives on baled hay has been gaining in popularity in recent years. These preservatives allow hay to be baled at higher moisture levels without spoilage. That practice, however, may be providing potentially dangerous conditions for farmers and firemen called upon to battle fires in barns where some chemically treated hay is stored. According to a recent article published in the National Hay Association Newsletter, more than 100 volunteer firemen required hospital treatment after battling a recent barn fire in New York state. The hay in the barn had been treated with a hay preservative containing ethoxyquin and BHT. Both are individually recognized as safe with several common uses in agriculture. However, when combined as a hay preservative and heated to 240 degrees, the mixture gave off hydrogen cyanide gas.

According to Donald A. Drum, professor of chemistry at

Columbia-Greene Community College, in Hudson, N.Y., there were several factors that prevented a serious loss of life at the barn fire. There was adequate ventilation above the burning hay and all of the hay was not yet ignited. Firemen had wet down many of the bales preventing a rise in temperature in most of the remaining hay.

Drum and Paul Rappleyea, a Syracuse University student, investigated the fire and have this advice to fire fighters:

Check to see if any and what type of preservatives have been used on the hay stored in a burning barn. Hay treated with commonly-used propionic acid did not give off hydrogen cyanide when heated in tests. However, the hay treated with the ethoxyquin/BHT formula showed dramatic increases in concentrations of hydrogen cyanide as the temperature of the burning hay rose.

Hydrogen cyanide is one of the fastest acting fatal poisons known to man. When gaseous hydrogen

cyanide is inhaled, the cyanide ions react instantly with the ferric ions present in the oxidizing enzymes of the blood. The resulting cyano-enzyme complex inhibits cellular respiration in the body's tissues," the report states.

The volunteer firemen and others at the barn fire were thought to be suffering from physical exhaustion. The symptoms were similar. weakness, nausea, headache, rapid breathing and fast heart beat. Oxygen was

administered by the rescue squads at the scene.

The report says that had the firemen known of the hydrogen cyanide danger, other immediate treatment could have been rendered.

Year's egg production down one percent

HARRISBURG — June, 1981 egg production in Pennsylvania totaled 335 million, according to the Pennsylvania Crop Reporting Service.

The June production was down one percent from the 339 million eggs produced during June, 1980. The June average of 16 million layers was one percent higher than a year ago. Egg production per 100 layers was 2,100 compared with

2,137 in June, 1980.

The nation's laying flocks produced 5.56 billion eggs during June 1981, fractionally less than the 5.58 billion produced a year ago. The number of layers during June averaged 279 million compared with 280 million a year earlier. Egg production per 100 layers during the month was 1,991 compared with 1,995 a year ago.

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