

Know what to do when **FIRE** strikes

BY BETH HEMMINGER
Staff Correspondent
CARLISLE — "Safeguard your farm against fire."

Randy Watts, Cumberland County Fire Service Coordinator says he cannot express the meanings of those words enough in the farming community. He recently spoke to the Cumberland County Dairy Calf Club on fire safety on the farm and many preventions and safety methods that can be used on the farm.

"The farming community is an important industry in Cumberland County and it is an important industry to the fire department, who must save barns, silos, or milking parlors with the utmost speed and efficiency," said the coordinator. Therefore, Watts says he feels that the farmers need to be educated in fire prevention and protection and help in the fight.

Farm fires are like any other fire—devastating; but, the farm has a few other handicaps which include the facility's size, quantity

of combustible materials in the area and the distance from the fire department. Watts noted that because of the farm's layout and size, usually if one building is engulfed in flames, others will be ignited.

Practically, everything on the farm is combustible, hay, wood, feed bags, silage, etc., which cannot be eliminated, but the farmer can make sure these materials are kept away from electricity, gasoline and other fire igniting materials.

Timing is the greatest factor in a fire according to Watts. Many times it is the only factor between entire destruction and partial damage.

In recent years other fire hazards have increased on the farm:

Spontaneous combustion of hay has been one of the major problems for farmers and fire fighters. Spontaneous combustion occurs when the moisture of hay is relatively high creating an at-

mosphere for bacteria to grow generating heat. Watts explained that as the temperature rises to a combustible stage, the only ingredient needed for the ignition is air. With a sufficient air flow the hay will immediately burst into flames much like a grass fire, burning rapidly and causing, in many cases as Watts slides showed, the complete destruction of the barn.

Silos have become another fire hazard on the farm. Watts explained that the silage reacts the same way as hay. When it is placed in the silo with a high moisture count the fermenting gases become heated, then the conditions are perfect, all that is needed is the addition of enough air to make the gases explode.

Consequently, fire fighters have had to be trained to fight the explosive fires and so must the farmers, says Watts. Because of lack of knowledge, several firemen and farmers have died throughout the United States due to inap-

propriate fire fighting methods of silos.

On one case, the fire fighters unknowingly put water into a silo, followed by foam. They then added the third ingredient for the tragedy—enough air to make the mixture explosive. The hose stream into the silo top would entrain, or pull with it, a large amount of outside air. Also, the foam is largely air bubbles. The fighters added the third and fatal item to the silo, causing explosion.

To prevent these type of accidents, Watts suggests some prevention measures for the silo.

Oxygen-free silos should be kept that way. Breather valves must be operating correctly, and all hatches and openings must be kept sealed as much as possible.

If a sealed silo has extremely hot material in it, keep hatches closed and proceed with unloading the material. Carbon dioxide under pressure or in the form of dry ice might be used to smother the fire and displace explosive gases.

In a conventional silo, explosions are less likely. The gases might flash, but lack of confinement would probably reduce the danger. Material going in should not be below 50% moisture for the unsealed unit. Compaction and distribution should be as even as possible.

And, if anyone in the family ever sees a brownish yellow gas floating around the silo area, immediately leave the area and call the fire department. The gas at this stage is very dangerous and could ignite at any time.

In conjunction with the Cumberland County Fire Department, the Cumberland County Extension Service is offering seminars and literature on fire safety on the farm to help educate the farmer about such fire hazards.

Along with farm fire safety, Watts spoke about general fire prevention practices that should be used in the home.

"Due to inflation of heating costs

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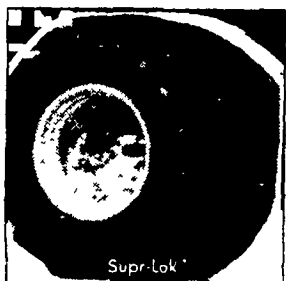
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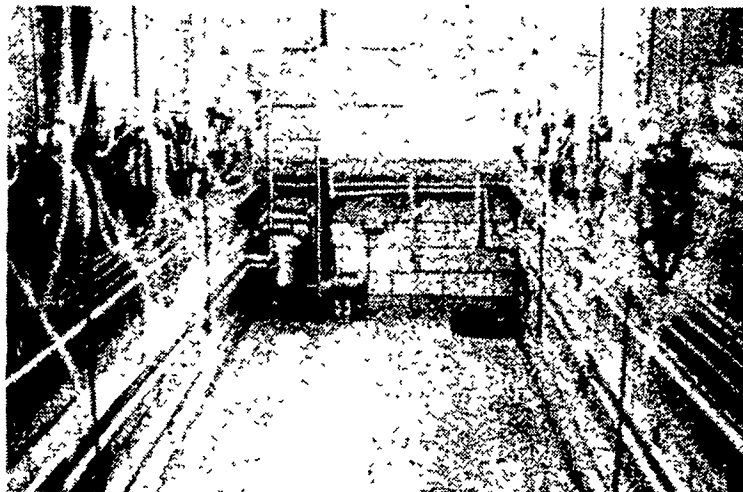
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