

Pre-planning for fires is wise investment

BY SUZANNE KEENE

EPHRATA — Stop for a moment and envision your home engulfed in flames with your family trapped inside. Just the thought of such a tragedy should be enough to send you rushing to the store to buy a smoke detector and a fire extinguisher if your home is not already equipped with these two important items.

Lancaster County Fire Safety Coordinator Randall Gockley, who works to promote fire safety, encourages people to plan ahead for a fire.

"Probably the most important thing that a person can have in their home is a smoke detector to offer protection," he said.

Every home should have a minimum of one smoke detector in each sleeping area and one for each additional story in the home. If several bedrooms are connected by a single hallway, one smoke detector would be sufficient for all of them, but if they are on different floors, there should be two detectors.

When selecting a smoke detector, consumers should look for one that is approved by the Underwriter's Lab, meaning it meets safety guidelines set by the National Fire Protection Association and other safety groups, Gockley advised.

Homeowners can pick from two types of smoke detectors - electric and battery. Gockley recommends purchasing an electric one because he has found that people neglect to replace batteries. It's too easy to take the battery out if cooking smoke sets it off and then forget to return it, he said.

An electric smoke detector costs about \$30 to \$50, and a battery operated one runs about \$8 to \$12. Gockley said he thinks the electric ones are worth the extra expense, citing a mobile home fire that killed a mother and three children. The home, he said, was equipped with two smoke detectors, but neither had batteries.

However, "If finances do not permit an electric smoke detector, a battery one is fine," Gockley said. If you select a battery-operated detector, he suggests testing the battery every week or two by pressing the detector's test button. In most cases the batteries will last about one year. The smoke

detector will make beeping noises when the battery is about to die, signaling that it is time for a replacement. It is extremely important to replace the battery as soon as possible. Gockley related a story in which a county family had dismantled their smoke detector one night when it started beeping because the battery was nearly dead. Three weeks later they had not replaced the battery and suffered a \$40,000 house fire.

Homes should also be equipped with fire extinguishers - one in the kitchen, one on the second floor, and one near any woodstoves in the home, Gockley said. But just having them is not enough. All family members should know where they are and how to use them.

Gockley advised buying a dry chemical Underwriter's Laboratory approved extinguisher that is capable of extinguishing all classes of fires. Some extinguishers, he explained, can only combat Class B (flammable liquid) and Class C (energized electrical equipment) fires. It is important to purchase an extinguisher that can also be used to combat Class A (ordinary combustible) fires.

Fire extinguishers should be discharged and recharged every six years, Gockley said. If you can't locate a business in your area that provides this service, your local fire company can refer you to one.

Before using your fire extinguisher make sure that everyone in the house knows there is a fire and starts getting out, then notify the fire department, Gockley advised. Only after taking these precautions should you use your extinguisher.

"If it gets too big, close the door behind you and get out," Gockley stressed. Gockley noted that many people

are reluctant to call the fire company because they are embarrassed or afraid they won't be able to afford the bill. In most cases, he assured, you will not receive a bill.

Another way of preparing for a fire is to develop and practice an evacuation plan. "It's very important that people, especially children, know two ways out of every room," Gockley said. "It's very important that the family talk about this before it occurs."

If a fire occurs while the occupants are sleeping - and most fires do - start yelling "FIRE! FIRE!" as soon as you discover it. Then, staying as low as possible, walk or crawl to the door. If the door is closed, feel it with the back of your hand. If it's hot, it's your barrier against the fire and you should take the other way out. If it's cool, open the door slowly and check the hallway. If it's clear, go the closest exit.

When discussing fire evacuation plans, Gockley suggests arranging a central meeting place outside the home where all family members can congregate and discover who is missing. Without such a place, parents might not find their kids right away and go back inside the burning building to get them. Thus, Gockley advised, is not wise. Once you are out of the house, stay out.

"It's bad to lose one but it's worse to lose two," he stressed.

Once you have developed a plan, practice it about every six months. Inform the family that there will be a fire drill in the coming week, then, later in the week, push the test button on your smoke detector to simulate a fire.

Repeating the drill every few months will assist children in remembering what to do in the event of a real fire, he said.

As volunteer fire chief of the Lincoln Fire Company in Ephrata, Gockley started a new program in the area where farmers voluntarily provide the fire company

with a list of the animals and chemicals on the farm and their locations. The farmers also send in a diagram of their farm, showing buildings, lanes, and possible water sources.

"The fire companies are trying to do some preplanning and preparation so we can handle the fires better," Gockley said.

The idea started, he said, following a barn fire in New York that hospitalized over 100 fireman about four years ago. The firemen became ill from inhaling the fumes from chemically-treated hay stored in the burning barn.

"That's why it's so important that we know what chemicals are stored inside," Gockley said. If the firemen had known about the chemicals they would have worn their face masks. Having information about the chemicals is also helpful in determining how to treat a fireman who has inhaled them, he added.

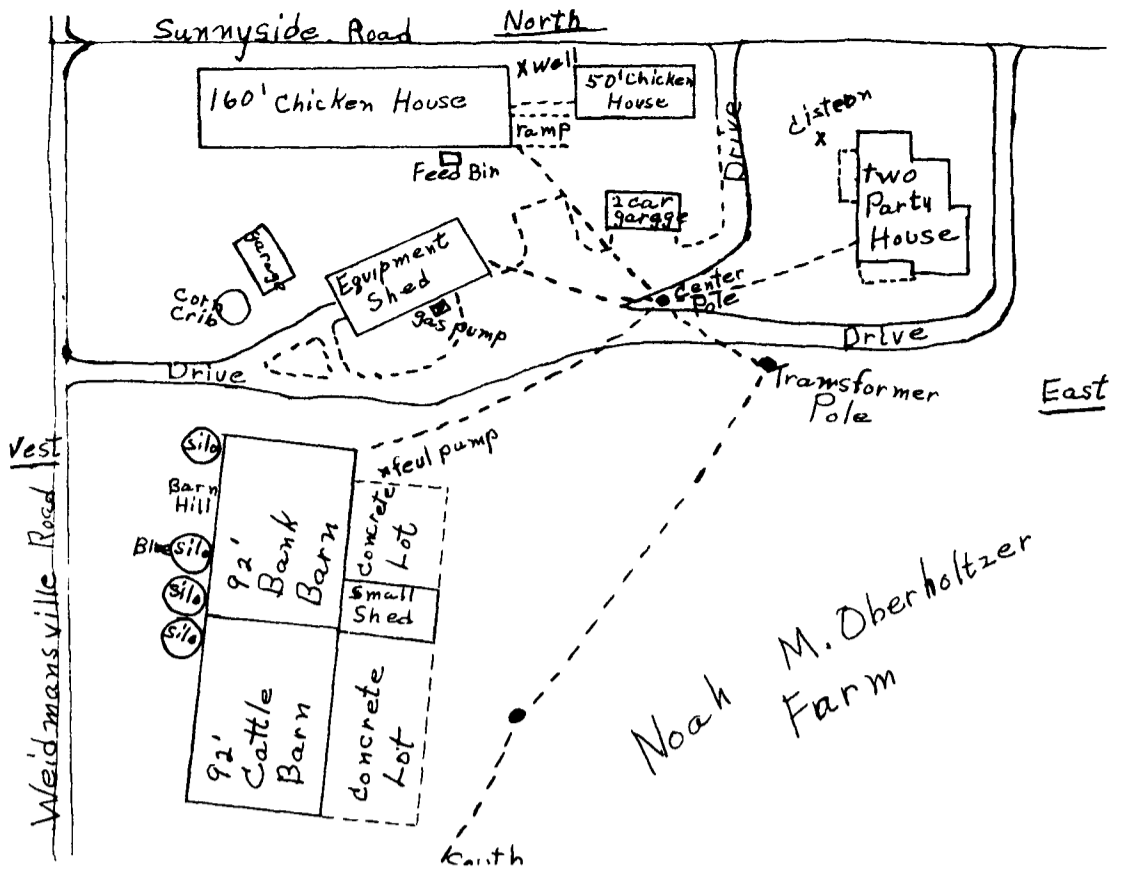
The program stresses the importance of water sources that are already on the property, and Gockley said he urges farmers to make their ponds and streams easily accessible to firefighters.

Often, he said, trees and gullies obstruct the way to streams and ponds. By clearing an area for the firetrucks, farmers could save their farm from unnecessary fire damage.

A barn fire today can cost a farmer over \$100,000. "Farmers have an awful lot to lose," he said.

Gockley said that farmers in his area have been quite receptive to the program, with 70 percent voluntarily participating. Other fire companies have also picked up on the idea and are doing similar things.

Gockley said he believes "farm families are really concerned about fire safety." Maybe that's why he hasn't had to use any of the farm diagrams farmers have sent him as part of his program.



If a fire were to occur, this diagram of the Noah M. Oberholtzer farm would help firemen identify the nearest water and access areas to farm buildings.

BACK HOME



By Michelle S. Rodgers

Lancaster Extension Home Economist

What-Can-I-Do-Blues

It's officially summer! By the time summer officially arrives the novelty of summer vacation may be wearing off. This is easy to diagnose. The typical symptom is a routine cry of "Mom! What can I do now?" This was one question I learned was better not to ask. My mother was always full of suggestions from hulling the peas to folding the laundry. My mother is a great list maker and if you are ever looking for something to do, just check her list!

However, the preschooler's ability to think of fun and permissible activities is sometimes limited. To preserve your sanity and to create a happier summer, stop now and do some planning. Sit down with the kids some morning when everyone is rested. Then brainstorm a list of things that would be fun to do this summer. Write these ideas down, and then pick one to do each day. You might set aside a time of day when you could all do this activity together (even hulling peas is more fun when everyone's doing it!). Here are some examples to get you started:

- housepainting - give the child a bucket of water and wide brush to "paint" the sidewalk or house.
- eat lunch in the backyard on a blanket.
- explore the yard or sidewalk with a magnifying glass.
- collect leaves, rocks or wild-flowers and identify them.
- draw a map of the street or neighborhood on a large sheet of paper. Fill in the houses, school, post office etc.
- fill a dishpan with cool water and provide water toys to use in it.

- invite neighborhood kids to bring their instruments and make a marching band (outside!).

- Take a silent walk and then identify all the different sounds you hear.

- write a letter to yourself and walk to the post office to mail it.

- make a sun dial. Take a paper plate outside and punch a pencil down through the center, into the ground. Watch a clock and ever hour mark the plate where the shadow falls.

- have a trike wash.

Remember, the idea of brainstorming is that any idea goes - write down all of them. One idea may work better one day than another. Try to include some rainy day activities, too.

One of the major benefits of brainstorming a list of ideas is the kids' involvement. They learn to take some responsibility for entertaining themselves and making decisions about what they do. Utilizing this technique may inspire your children to continue thinking for themselves.

Another idea would be to put the ideas in a large jar. When the search question of "What can I do now" comes up - retreat to the jar. Whatever idea is on the slip is the next activity to undertake.

As a child living on the farm created a summer full of exciting activities. However, I'm sure I too suffered from the what-can-I-do-blues. I hope these ideas help you combat the blues and make this summer a fun, productive one.

For more ideas on family activities, contact your Extension Office for the Celebrate Your Family series.

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