

Chop Animal Bedding Materials Safely

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Farm animals, like people, need a good night's rest. To help them get it, farmers use bedding materials such as straw, sawdust, and newspaper. Animal bedding often is chopped, a task that can be hazardous.

If you chop your own bedding, it's wise to keep a few precautions in mind.

"No matter what type of machine you use to chop bedding materials, be sure to take appropriate precautions to prevent injuries and accidents," said Dr. James Hilton, associate professor of agricultural

engineering in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"Start by reading the operator's manual. Be familiar with the manufacturer's warnings and follow the recommended safety practices at all times. Never remove safety guards from the machine."

Foreign objects such as rocks, metal cans, and other garbage often are mixed in with newspaper. "You should always wear eye protection when chopping in case the machine throws debris into the air," Hilton said. "Don't allow casual observers nearby while a machine is running."

Keep the safety of your animals in mind, too. "If you're chopping inside the barn, keep the machine as far from the animals as possible. Flying debris can hurt cows or horses as well as you."

Accidents are likely if you try to unclog the chopping machine while it's running. "The blades on most chopppers are very close to the discharge opening, so keep your hands well away from it," Hilton said. "If your chopper becomes clogged, turn it off and wait until the motor has stopped completely before trying to unclog it. Never risk trying to clear it with a

broom handle or stick while the machine is running.

"Wear leather gloves when unclogging the machine — the cutting mechanisms are extremely sharp. Blades strong enough to chop a bale of newspaper or straw can easily do the same to your hands."

Chopping newspaper and straw can fill the air with dust and organic particles that can cause severe respiratory problems. "Protect your lungs by wearing a particle mask or respirator to filter the air," Hilton said.

Bedding materials, including newspaper, can burn very quickly, so treat them with caution. "It only

takes one spark to create a disaster," said Hilton. "Be prepared by keeping fire extinguishers and a water source inside the barn. Take steps to minimize the potential for sparks and flames in the barn, especially during hot, dry weather."

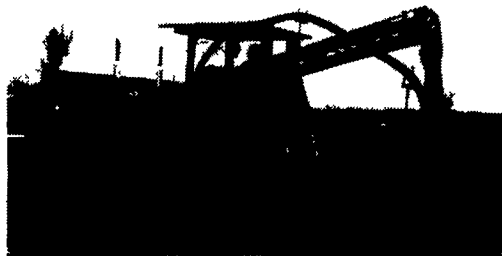
If you're using a gas-powered chopper, be sure to let it cool down and take it outdoors before adding fuel. Wipe any fuel spills and store combustible materials away from bedding materials.

To keep any machine operating smoothly and safely, clean it often. "A dirty machine isn't just an eyesore. It also can be dangerous," Hilton said.

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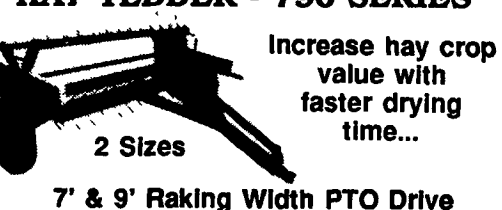


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