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Fire Chief urges diligence from farmers and agricultural property owners

By Michelle Janzen

A number of recent barn fires in Ontario have resulted in significant loss of property, including livestock.

The emotional and financial impact of a barn fire can be devastating to the owner, the community and the emergency personnel who respond to the incident.

The Shelburne and District Fire Department reminds property owners that most farm buildings are not regulated under the Ontario Fire Code and, as such, local fire services have limited responsibilities with respect to inspections and code enforcement on these properties.

Fire Chief Brad Lemaich stresses that fire safety is the owner/operator's responsibility.

?There are a number of things that property owners can do to help prevent fires and reduce the risk of fire spreading if one starts.? says Chief Lemaich.

The following proactive steps can easily be taken to help reduce the risk of fire on farm properties:

- Prohibit smoking in and around farm buildings;
- Ensure electrical installations and appliances are kept clean and in good working order: ensure all electrical work is performed by licensed contractors;
- Discontinue the use of extension cords and unsafe wiring;
- Perform welding and cutting operations only in areas that are free of combustible materials;
- Store and handle hazardous products according to manufacturers' recommendations and applicable regulations: mix fertilizers and chemicals carefully in well-ventilated areas, and
- Provide and maintain a clear unobstructed laneway or yard area to each building and access to water supplies that might be required for firefighting.

For additional details on how to mitigate the risk of fire on farm properties, a free publication entitled Reducing the Risk of Fire on Your Farm is available for download from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs website at www.omafra.gov.on.ca.

This document includes tips on fire prevention and preventative maintenance and provides a checklist to assess fire risks in farm buildings.

Owners and operators of farms and agricultural business properties with further concerns about fire safety should contact the Shelburne and District Fire Department to discuss options to identify and reduce fire risks.

For more information, contact Shelburne and District Fire Department at 519-925-5111 or at sdfd@bellnet.ca.