

Preventing Combine Fires



Dry field conditions that are ideal for a successful fall harvest also bring the danger of combine fires. Dry crop residue provides the tinder, and a small spark or heat source is all that is necessary for a combine fire to start. Combine fires can lead not only to lost time but substantial property damage and even injury or loss of life.

Keep Your Equipment Clean

What can you do to lessen your risk of a combine fire? First and foremost, prevention is essential. Remember the old saying, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Cleanliness and maintenance are essential for combine fire prevention. Use a pressure washer or a compressed air blowgun to thoroughly clean and remove dust, dirt, grease, and crop residues from your equipment. Many farmers also find a hand-held gas-

powered leaf blower useful for cleaning equipment in the field. Not only will you have eliminated the “tinder” from which a fire can start, but you will have equipment that will run cooler and more efficiently. Regardless of how busy you may be, take the time to keep your equipment clean.

Pay Special Attention to Routine Maintenance

Check lubricant levels often, and grease fittings regularly. Fix leaking oil, fuel, or hydraulic lines promptly. Check belts for proper tension and wear to reduce friction. Carefully check bearings for excessive heat—overheated bearings are a major cause of combine fires. Pay particular attention to the exhaust system, checking for leaks, damage, or an accumulation of crop residue. High heat or a spark from the exhaust can easily ignite dry crop residue. Take a close look at the wiring system, checking for exposed wiring or insulation deterioration. Remember, a blown fuse indicates an electrical problem—never replace a blown fuse with a new fuse of higher amperage.

Special Precautions for Refueling

When refueling becomes necessary, always shut off the engine and let the equipment cool for 15 minutes before

you refuel. Extinguish all sources of flame and smoking materials before refueling. If fuel spills on the engine, wipe off any excess and allow the fumes to dissipate. Never store flammable liquids in glass or nonapproved containers. The few minutes that you spend safely refueling are insignificant compared to the property damage or injury that can be caused by a fire.

What If, Despite Our Best Efforts at Prevention, a Fire Does Occur?

Being prepared can prevent substantial loss. Experts recommend that at least one fully charged 10-lb. ABC fire extinguisher be carried on all equipment. Better yet, carry two: one in the cab and one where it can be reached from the ground. The cost of fire extinguishers is insignificant when compared with the cost of your equipment. Remember that any partial discharge from an extinguisher requires it to be recharged. Visually check your extinguishers monthly, looking for cracks in the hose and inspecting the gauge to see if the extinguisher is fully charged. Have a professional fire extinguisher company inspect your fire extinguishers

annually. Carry your cell phone or 2-way radio with you at all times so you can summon help. If a fire does occur, CALL 911 FIRST, and then attempt to extinguish the fire by pulling the pin on the fire extinguisher and squeezing the handles together. Aim the nozzle at the base of the fire and sweep from side to side. Remember P.A.S.S., which stands for Pull, Aim, Squeeze, Sweep.

By exercising proper fire prevention and preparedness and keeping your equipment well maintained and clean, you can help ensure a safe harvest season.

References

National Ag Safety Database
Preventing Farm Equipment Fires
Nebraska Forest Service, Lincoln, NE
<http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/>

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