

Clean-up After a Fire on the Farm

SAFETY CONCERNS AND WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

Hazards may still exist after firefighters leave the scene of a farm fire. Contaminated water runoff and hazardous debris are two of the most common challenges for farmers during clean-up efforts. With a little foresight, you can avoid injury to yourself, your family and your livestock. You also can streamline clean-up and rebuilding.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- ◆ *Contaminated water runoff.* When water used in firefighting mixes with pesticides, fuels or other hazardous materials, the result is a harmful runoff. It poses an immediate threat to groundwater (including your wells), surface water, humans, animals and the environment. By law, appropriate steps must be taken for containment and clean-up.
 - a) *Notify authorities.* If hazardous materials have been released in the course of firefighting, local and state authorities must be notified and consulted for legal clean-up methods. Immediately contact your Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC), as well as the Wisconsin Division of Emergency Government Spill Hotline at (800) 943-0003.
 - b) *Containment.* In some cases, the fire department may help build dikes or ditches to help contain water runoff until local emergency response teams (hazardous materials specialists) arrive. In other cases, emergency response teams will be called in to contain and clean up the spill. If a spill is very small, officials may request that you clean up the spill and dispose of waste at the next Agricultural Clean Sweep event. In either case, try to direct hazardous runoff away from porous (sand or gravel) soils to avoid groundwater contamination.
 - c) *Take safety precautions.* Wear protective gear if you must enter a contaminated area, such as a flooded pesticide storage room. Keep livestock away from contaminated waters. Place warning signs on contaminated areas and/or fence them off so that livestock, children or others aren't accidentally exposed.

- ◆ *Building debris.* Before beginning clean-up, take photographs or make a videotape of damage. This will be helpful for insurance records and/or income tax loss deductions. Also, have an insurance adjuster inspect the premises. Based on insurance reimbursement and advice from a building inspector or contractor, make decisions about whether to rebuild or restore existing facilities (See the fact sheet, "Salvaging Buildings After a Fire.") Some clean-up suggestions:
 - a) *Turn off the power to damaged buildings.* Normally, power is shut off during firefighting. Nevertheless, be absolutely sure you are not dealing with live wires.
 - b) *Wear protective gear and use caution.* Falling debris, exposed nails, glass, contaminants and sharp edges all pose hazards during clean-up. Wear steel-toed boots, a hard hat, gloves and other protective gear when necessary.

- c) *Ask about local and state requirements for refuse disposal, including any special requirements for livestock killed by fire.*
 - d) *Hire a professional contractor for demolition. A professional is your best bet for safe, efficient clean-up.*
- ◆ *Farm equipment and vehicles.* Contact your insurance agent to ascertain coverage and decide whether restoration is feasible. Even if vehicles were not burned, heat can damage rubber, plastic, glass and paint. If farm vehicles and field equipment have sustained only minor to moderate smoke damage, specialty cleaning companies can provide steam cleaning. Smoke cannot get into sealed engines, so reconditioning usually is not a concern. For milking equipment, contact the manufacturer about clean-up and testing services.

Additional resources:

Your county agricultural agent, your insurance agent