

Managing Farm Emergencies

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You are the American farmer. You produce bountiful crops of fruits and vegetables and grains that feed not only your fellow citizens but also people around the world, and you raise livestock to put meat and milk on our tables—but none of this without risk. Farming is one of the most dangerous occupations in the country.

We could cite countless factors that contribute to farm accidents and emergencies, but the point is, they happen. They happen to the farmer who least expects it and even to the farmer who is alert and cautious. Accidents may happen despite your doing everything possible to prevent them, so it is important for you, your family, and your employees to know how to respond if an emergency occurs.

Prepare ahead of time to react appropriately. Communicate with emergency responders in your area. Conduct a tour of your facilities for local firefighters and provide them with a copy of your emergency response plan.



First Things First

Call for help immediately

Don't hesitate. Don't be afraid to ask for help. "Time lost" works against you. A minor incident can quickly escalate to catastrophe, so call 911 at the first sign of an emergency. This sends your county's emergency response team into action. If it turns out that the situation is *not* an emergency, you can call back to cancel your request for assistance. It is much better to be overly cautious than not cautious enough.

- **State your address first.** The first thing to tell the 911 dispatcher is the address where the incident is taking place, including the county. Some fire departments cover townships in more than one county, and if the phone goes dead right after the dispatcher is told the barn is on fire, for example, or if you're calling from a cell phone, she may not know where to send help.
- **State the nature of the emergency.** Is it a fire, a chemical spill, a medical emergency, an equipment accident, or what? The 911 operator will need this information to determine what emergency teams to dispatch: ambulance, fire department, police, HAZMAT squad, or first responder medical units. In most cases, more than one team will be directed to the scene. Firefighters commonly use a response chart to determine which trucks to dispatch and what other equipment may be needed.
- **Provide details.** State the situation and answer the 911 dispatcher's questions accurately and concisely. Do not hang up until instructed to do so.

Warning! Using a Cell Phone to Call 911 May Cost Valuable Time

Your local 911 office may not get the call. A cell phone call to 911 is first transmitted to the closest tower, where personnel may direct your call to the wrong 911 emergency center unless you provide precise information. Be sure to state the following:

- the **road or highway location** of the incident
- the **county** where the incident is taking place
- the **state** in which the emergency is occurring
- the nearest **city**



The Lafayette *Journal and Courier* published this article from *The Associated Press* on June 15, 2002. The opening paragraph reads, "State officials are cautioning cell phone users that emergency help is not necessarily just a 911 call away." It goes on to say that "depending which cellular service they use, Indiana consumers may not be able to make emergency calls on their mobile phones."

The article explains that "cell phones function differently (than) traditional phones when 911 is dialed. Without the proper technology, wireless companies are unable to connect their customers' 911 calls to the closest public-safety agency or provide basic information to rescue crews. Cell phone users can visit <http://www.911coverage.org> to see a county-by-county map detailing which Indiana companies provide the service to their customers." State treasurer Tim Berry, who heads an advisory board on the issue, said that consumers need to consider this information in deciding on a wireless carrier. Lake County is currently the only Indiana county with upgraded service that can track a caller's location within 400 feet of the call.

You Are the Expert

Do not assume that emergency responders know your operation, even if they have previously toured your facilities. In most cases, emergency personnel plan their response strategies on their way to the scene based solely on the information relayed to them by the 911 dispatcher; and once they arrive they will rely heavily on the information that you provide. *You are the expert on your own farm.*

If the emergency is a fire and if the situation allows, conduct a site safety briefing with the senior fire officer upon his arrival. Quickly inform him of hazards such as a manure pit under the floor of a burning building or ammunition, chemicals, or other flammables stored in the building or adjacent structures. It is these details that make each emergency unique. It is also these details that allow emergency responders to make a positive difference in protecting your life and property and the environment.

Thinking and Planning on the Run

If an emergency occurs on your farm, you will naturally expect emergency responders to arrive quickly, take charge, and control the situation: so the more information you provide, the better. The dispatcher will ask a series of questions and relay your answers to emergency personnel responding to the call. Responders will talk by radio en route to the scene, relaying information and pooling ideas as the situation develops. They may request backup personnel trained specifically for the type of emergency that is unfolding.

Help! The barn is on fire!

The most important thing to tell the 911 dispatcher when calling to report a fire is whether or not everyone is accounted for. Knowing whether or not there is someone trapped by the fire is critical to the firefighters' approach to combating it. If there are injuries, describe them to the best of your ability.

Tell the dispatcher what is burning: a building, a field, a vehicle, fuel or chemical tanks, etc. Describe the fire. Do you see flames or smoke? What color is the smoke? If it is a structural fire, is the building engulfed in flames?

What are the building's contents? Equipment? Pesticides or other chemicals? Hay or straw? Animals? Paints? Are there live power lines leading into the building? If the building has natural gas or propane service, are the lines shut off? Was there an explosion before the fire or after it broke out? Are there other buildings or flammable objects such as fuel tanks close-by?

Different kinds of fires require different firefighting tactics. A fully engulfed structure might dictate a defensive approach; that is, firefighters might concentrate more on containing the blaze and protecting nearby structures than on putting it out. But if the fire is still controllable when they arrive on the scene, firefighters will generally try to extinguish it.

There are situations where it is advisable to let a chemical fire burn itself out, but responsibility for the decision to do so lies with the chief fire officer at the scene, *not*



Mike Titus

with you. Obviously, your personal judgment and expertise will benefit firefighters in establishing their plan of attack, but remember that they—not you—have legal control of fire and rescue decisions at the scene. Help them by providing as much information as possible, but allow them to do their job.

Vehicular Fire

If you are reporting a vehicle on fire, is there anyone trapped inside? Where is the vehicle parked? Is it inside a garage or building? Is it near buildings, fuel tanks, or other combustible materials?

Come quickly! He's hurt!

As a farmer, you have to know how to safely operate numerous types of complicated equipment. You are your own best friend in taking precautions specific to the job you're doing and to the equipment you're using—and you're your own worst enemy if you don't! Human error often mirrors the Grim Reaper.

The most common farm accidents involve one or more of the following:

- Grain bins and silos
- Toxic fumes from manure pits
- Equipment shifting or roll-overs
- Equipment contact with power lines
- Power takeoffs
- Livestock
- Pesticides
- Anhydrous ammonia



A "victim" is removed from a grain bin during a staged training drill.

When reporting an injury, provide the 911 dispatcher with as much of the following information as possible:

- The location of the accident
- The type of accident you are reporting
- The nature of the injury
- The general condition of the injured person: Is the injury life-threatening?
- Whether or not the victim is breathing
- Whether or not the victim is conscious and talking
- Accessibility of the injured (How close can emergency equipment be driven to the actual site?)
- The proximity of the injured to a site where a helicopter might be able to land if needed

The dispatcher will relay this information to medical and rescue professionals who will begin assessing the situation and formulating their response. It is very important to relay information accurately and concisely. Based on the information you provide, responders will judge what types of medical personnel to have on standby and assess whether or not the victim will need to be airlifted to a trauma facility.

It's all over the ground!

You probably have several kinds of chemicals on your farm: pesticides, acetylene, anhydrous ammonia, liquid fertilizers, paints, lubricants, oils, gasoline, diesel fuel, antifreeze, etc. They may be in small plastic jugs or large metal storage tanks, but any container can leak or break open, causing a spill or human exposure.



If you have a spill or an exposure incident, the first and most important thing that responders will need to know is the name of the product. This is one reason why it is critical to have accurate, non-obiterated labels on all farm chemicals.

What would you tell the 911 dispatcher if one of these chemicals had just caused a poisoning on your farm? Where would you access the information needed to save a life?

Following are details that you may be asked to provide:

- The name of the product
- The quantity spilled
- Whether or not anybody was hurt or exposed to contamination resulting from the spill
- Whether the spill is contained or still flowing
- If the contaminant is still moving, the direction (north, south, east, west) in which it is headed
- The direction from which the wind is blowing
- Whether there is a well, a body of water, or a ditch nearby
- How the spill occurred



Not Just One Phone Call

Most people who call 911 then call their family, neighbors, employers, and insurance companies. They may assume that that will take care of everything. But anytime there is an emergency involving a chemical, *you are required by law to notify various local, state, and federal agencies.* To reiterate, *you* are responsible for making these calls. Local emergency management personnel can help you determine who needs to be called.

- Spills that threaten water must be reported *within two hours of discovery* to the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, (888) 233-SPIL (7745).
- A spill involving 100 pounds or more of anhydrous ammonia must be reported to the following agencies:

County: Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC), <http://www.ai.org/ierc/>
State: Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM), (888) 233-7745
Federal: National Response Center, (800) 424-8802

Planning for Emergencies

The emergency situations described thus far are those in which you are available to provide information to responders. But what if you are not there when an emergency occurs? Or what if you are the injured party? Planning ahead can mean the difference—literally—between life and death.

The sensible approach is to pre-plan for an emergency. Simply put, pre-planning means drawing up a map of the

farmstead that shows the location of ditches and creeks, drainage tiles, storage tanks and other chemical storage facilities, private transformers, and shutoffs for power and gas. You should provide the local fire



department with a copy of the map or at least notify responders where to find the map on your property, e.g., in an emergency mailbox (*not* the box in which you receive mail).

Invite local firefighters and rescue personnel to tour your farm. Explain details written into the plan and show them exactly where items marked on the map are located.

This strategy has been used successfully for many years. The thing is, it takes some time and effort on your part. *Are you willing?*

Call your local agricultural chemical dealer to obtain material safety data sheets (MSDSs) for the chemicals that you use and store. In the event of an emergency involving a chemical, give responders the MSDS as soon as they arrive.

Post your 911 road or highway address in 3-inch reflective letters and numbers on a sign by your driveway, or apply such lettering to both sides of your postal mailbox. In either case, *the address must be readable from both directions.*



Don Biehle



Don Biehle



Don Biehle

Summary

Fire departments, medical personnel, police, and emergency response teams in rural areas are trained to deal with emergencies on the farm. Whether they are volunteers or paid staff, responders depend on you, your family members, and your employees for valuable information during an emergency. Voluntary responders invest their time and energy in helping you in times of need—without pay. So put some effort into planning for emergencies: Help the helpful help you!

What can one person do after the incident has been reported?

In all emergencies

- Account for all personnel and keep everyone a safe distance from the scene.
- Keep injury victims calm and stabilized.

If the emergency involves fire

- Remove burn victims' clothing and flush the skin with cool water.
- Stay away from burning structures. Do not try to fight a fire with a garden hose.
- Turn off gas and electricity.
- If you can do so safely, move equipment and other obstacles out of the area to allow space for responders to work.

If the emergency involves a chemical release

- If someone has come into contact with corrosives or pesticides, remove their clothing and douse the skin with cool water.
- Dike the area with sand bags, soil, or gravel to control runoff.

Help Is Available

Purdue Pesticide Programs offers a number of publications that deal with emergency prevention and response. Contact the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service, (888) 398-4636, extension 46794, for copies of the publications listed in the blue box.

Publication Title	Publication Number
Pesticides and Container Management	PPP-21
Pesticides and Their Proper Storage	PPP-26
Pesticides and Spill Management	PPP-28
Pesticides and Community Right-to-Know	PPP-32
Pesticides and the Law	PPP-36
Pesticides and Material Safety Data Sheets	PPP-37
Pesticides and Personal Protective Equipment	PPP-38
Pesticides and Environmental Site Assessment	PPP-42
Pesticides and Planning for Emergencies	PPP-44
The Quick Response Emergency Plan	PPP-45
The Insurance Policy	PPP-49
Managing Farm Chemicals	PPP-50
Company Bulletin Boards	PPP-55

You can access information on our programs and download most of our publications at the following website: <http://www.purdue.edu/PPP/>

For information on regulations:

The Complete Federal and State Compliance Guide for Hoosier Businesses (437 pp.) Purdue University Press: <http://www.thepress.purdue.edu>

For information on pesticide management:

The Complete Book of Pesticide Management (787 pp.) Wiley-Interscience: <http://www.wiley.com>

Contact Purdue Pesticide Programs anytime you have questions or comments:

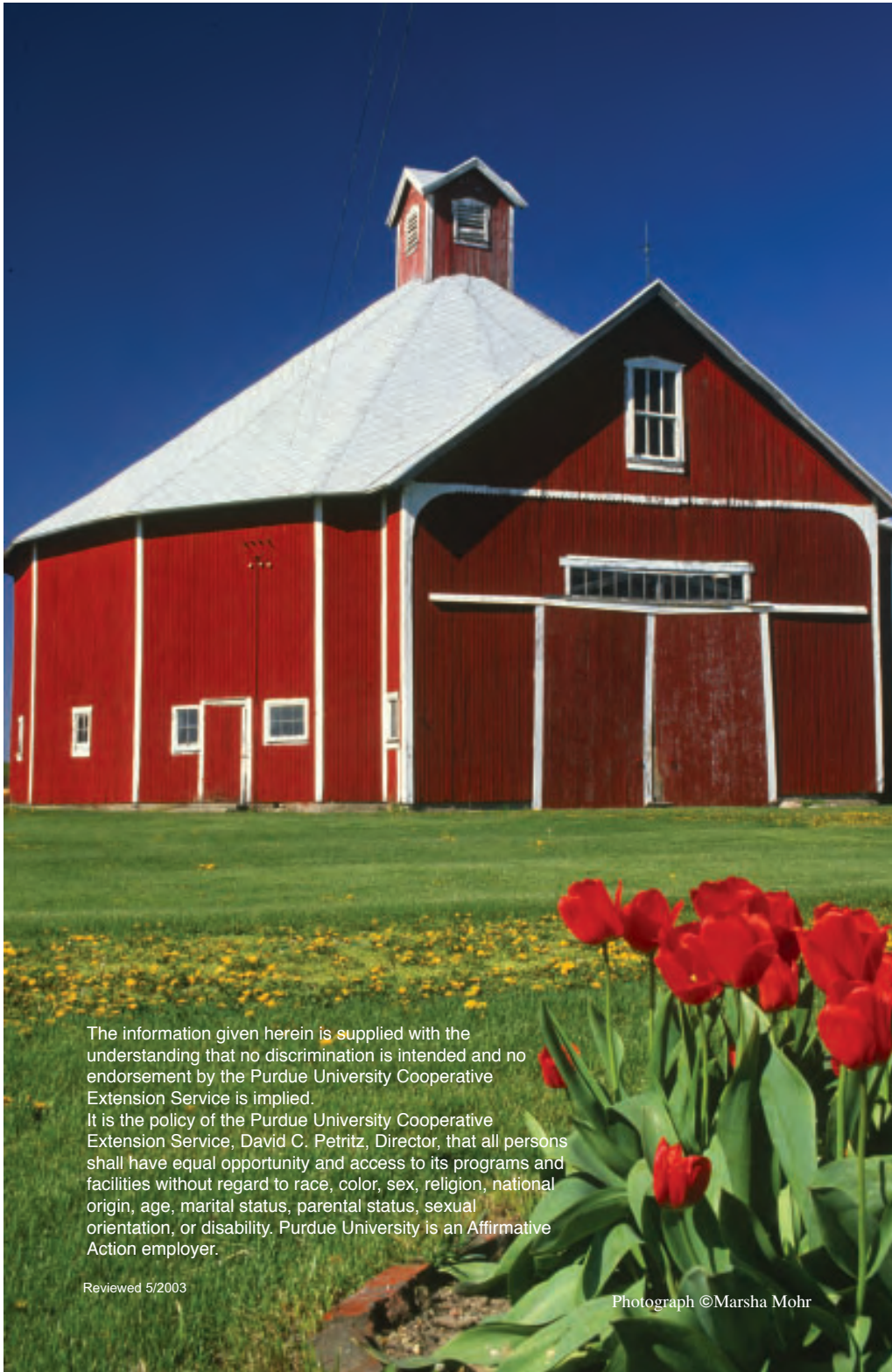
Phone: (765) 494-4566 or
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