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Monthly Safety Blast

Produced by the Southwest Center for Agricultural Health, Injury Prevention and Education

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Fire Extinguisher Safety

Fires can and may occur in almost any work environment. Agricultural, forestry/logging and fishing (AFF) work sites can be particularly prone to fires due to the use of fuels and other flammable materials, ignition sources, and exposure to extreme weather. Overheated machinery, hay, forest fires, and faulty electrical have all been known to cause fires on AFF sites. A quick google search for 'barn fire' reveals at least three costly incidents in May 2015. In March of this year, 50,000 chickens were lost in a poultry farm fire. Owner/operators and workers should be trained on fire prevention and on the effective use of a fire extinguisher.

Fire requires fuel, oxygen and heat in order to ignite. Fire extinguishers are designed to remove one of these elements by applying an agent that either cools the burning fuel, or removes or displaces the surrounding oxygen. The first line of defense against a small fire is often a portable fire extinguisher, typically placed where it's easy to access. Having an accessible fire extinguisher in the work environment could save the property owner and employee lots of financial stress; not to mention, lots of emotional and physical stress too.

Before using your fire extinguisher, be sure to read the instructions. A typical fire extinguisher contains 10 seconds of extinguishing power. This could be less if it has already been partially discharged.

Fire prevention experts recommend hands-on fire training. Most local fire departments offer this service. Once the fire is out, don't walk away! Watch the area for a few minutes in case it re-ignites; it's a good idea to have someone there as backup. Recharge the extinguisher immediately after use. Use the **PASS** acronym as a quick reference (it is a good idea to print this reference and pin it next to your fire extinguisher):

How to Proper Extinguish a Fire:

- **P**ull the pin at the top of the extinguisher. The pin releases a locking mechanism and will allow you to discharge the extinguisher.
- **A**im at the base of the fire, not the flames. This is important - in order to put out the fire, you must extinguish the fuel.
- **S**queeze the lever slowly. This will release the extinguishing agent in the extinguisher. If the handle is released, the discharge will stop.

- **S**weep from side to side. Using a sweeping motion, move the fire extinguisher back and forth until the fire is completely out. Operate the extinguisher from a safe distance, several feet away, and then move towards the fire once it starts to diminish. Be sure to read the instructions on your fire extinguisher - different fire extinguishers recommend operating them from different distances.

Resources:

- https://ehs.okstate.edu
- http://www.eastexasfire.com
- https://www.osha.gov

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