

Stay Protected with Tips on Preventing Hay Fires.

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- Field stored bales should be stored in rows of north to south direction to maximize the sun exposure.
- If you do not have a raised concrete pad, then utilize coarse stone on the ground under the bales to reduce moisture absorption.
- Do not stack hay near public roads where discarded cigarettes can cause ignition.
- Hay stored in barns should have an opening at each end, whenever possible, to encourage cross ventilation and reduce moisture build up.
- Remove and separate any bales of hay that begin to collapse as this is a sign that the bales are subject to spontaneous combustion.
- Keep haystacks as small as possible with a 100 Ft. minimum separation between stacks.
- Only purchase hay from reputable brokers. Calls offering one time “cheap loads” of hay from unknown brokers should be avoided.
- Large bales are more likely to start fires. Be extremely careful in putting up large bales. Probe all bales and remove any questionable hay.
- “Sniff Test.” Hay bales produce an odor, similar to the smell of tobacco, prior to spontaneous combustion. This “composting odor” is a good warning signal. If this or a sweet caramel odor is present, remove bales to get to the center of the stack and probe bales.
- Independently test to verify moisture level and Total Digestible Nutrients (TDN). Small rectangular bales should have moisture content less than 20%, and large rectangular or round bales should have moisture content below 18%.
- High moisture hay should be probed every day for at least six weeks after baling. Most fires occur during this period.
- Commercial hay probes are good but are too short to probe the center of haystacks. Use a 10 Ft. iron pipe with eight 3/8-inch holes drilled approximately 3 inches from one end, then hammer that end together to form a sharp end. This will make a simple probe that can reach deep into the center of the stack. Lower a thermometer to the end of the probe with a piece of small wire. After 15 minutes, retrieve the thermometer. If the temperature is nearly 150 degrees, the temperature will most likely continue to climb. Remove hay to provide circulation and cooling.
- Temperatures of 170 degrees indicate that a fire is imminent or already present somewhere in the bale. Take every precaution when handling hay at this temperature.