

You Can Never Be too Prepared for an Emergency

By Lindsay Ferlito

Nobody likes to think about the worst happening on their farm, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't take the time to prepare just in case. Whether it's a barn fire, a roof collapse, or a natural disaster, you need to have an emergency plan in place.

The National FARM Program requires you to post an emergency contact sheet somewhere visible and accessible on the farm. This sheet should include the farm's physical address, as well as names and phone numbers for the farm owner, a neighbor who can help, and other important personnel (like the herd veterinarian, milk coop handler/representative, and feed dealer). The FARM Program also has a Comprehensive Emergency Action Plan Guidance sheet which provides valuable info on how to prepare for an emergency.

Emergency preparedness plans should include:

- Maps of the farmstead including the location of all barns, houses, manure pits, as well as the location of hazardous materials and the water and gas shut off
- A list of all hazardous materials and chemicals on the farm and where they are located
- A copy of the emergency contact sheet
- Who is in charge for each type of emergency
- Copies of insurance plans or contact info for insurance companies
- A humane euthanasia plan in case animals need to be put down
- A few local farmer neighbors that could help move or house cattle if they need to leave the site

In addition to your written plan, to prepare for an emergency, your farm should also have:

- back-up power and fuel sources
- alarms (smoke and carbon monoxide) and fire extinguishers
- 2-3 days of water supply and feed for the animals
- the proper insurance for your buildings, equipment, and animals
- exits that are clearly marked in all buildings

To go one step further, you should invite your local fire departments and first responders to come out to your farm. Give them a tour, identify any possible hazards, and outline your emergency plan. Remember that a lot of first responders have never set foot on a farm or worked with large animals, so they may not know what to do with a bunch of loose cows during a disaster.

You can also take action to prevent certain emergencies from happening, including:

- properly train all employees on the emergency plan
- conduct regular fire and emergency drills
- regularly check all alarms and extinguishers to make sure they work
- repair structural damage to buildings (roofs, support beams, etc) in a timely manner
- remove heavy snow loads from roofs when necessary
- use LED lightbulbs or have covers to protect them
- no smoking in or near barns or feed storage
- don't use heaters or heat lamps in the barn, and if you do, watch them closely

- limit the use of extension cords

For more information or resources, contact your local first responders or check out the National Fire Protection Association website (www.nfpa.org/farms) and the National Farm website (<http://www.nationaldairyfarm.com/resource-library>).