PREVENTING COMBINE FIRES

During a three day period in October 2011, 100 combine fires erupted in northwestern Iowa within a 10 county area. Warm temperatures, high winds and exceptionally dry crop conditions were some of the contributing factors. But, combine fires can erupt anytime there is an accumulation of crop tinder near a hot spot.

Crop tinder doesn't have to sit on a hot component to ignite. When the machine is operating under heavy load conditions, just coming close to a hot area can cause material to ignite. Once the fire starts, it is easy for the entire combine to quickly become engulfed in flames. One spark can easily burn $500,000 worth of equipment within minutes. Not to mention the lost time to complete harvest. For a farmer, this can be devastating and makes preventing combine fires especially important.

It is never too early to begin preventive measures. Routine maintenance such as cleaning equipment, greasing fittings, checking lubricants and belts for proper wear and tension are all very important to reduce the likelihood of a fire. Checking for leaks in oil, fuel, exhaust or hydraulic lines is also very important.

During harvest, take time to be safe. Clean the combine often and when the day's work is done, let the combine cool down outside away from other equipment and

buildings. Before refueling, let the equipment cool for 15 minutes and extinguish all smoking materials or other flame sources. Wipe off any excess or spilled fuel. Store all flammable liquids in an approved container.

Last but not least, be prepared. Experts suggest carrying at least one fully charged 10lb ABC fire extinguisher. Better yet, carry two: one in the cab and one that can be reached from the ground. Some farmers even keep a water truck in the field nearby.

To learn more about combine fires and research to reduce those fires, visit the South Dakota State University website. (www.sdstate.edu/news/articles/agricultural-engineers-develop-system-to-prevent-combine-fires.cfm)