

Prevent a Tragedy-Keep Portable Heaters and Heat Lamps Out of Your Barn

I keep records on media reports of barn fires and the animals lost in those fires. Each winter hundreds of animals die in fires caused by portable heaters and heat lamps. Animals very often dislodge or tip over the appliances, allowing them to come in contact with flammable straw or other bedding. Prevention is simple: do not use portable heaters or heat lamps in barns.

November 23, 2008 (FPRC) -- Chagrin Falls, Ohio: We're starting the "season of the portable heater" with its resulting totally preventable barn fires. Human intervention by breeding "out of season" disrupts the natural cycle of breeding, gestation, and birth so that newborns do not arrive in spring when grass is rich in nutrients and the temperatures are comfortable. In an attempt to compensate, too often people use portable heaters and heat lamps to raise the air temperature for the newborns.

With the possible exception of piglets, most healthy newborn animals need only above-freezing temperatures and wind protection. Once a newborn has been dried off, if it needs extra warmth, use blankets, or animal covers, which are available for foals, calves, kids and lambs (I haven't seen any yet for piglets). If you can't afford to buy covers for your animals, make them out of old wool or thermal blankets--they don't have to be pretty, they just have to do the job.

Before the tragedies escalate I implore everyone housing animals to do something vitally important for every confined animal: tell all the barn owners in your area to keep portable heaters and heat lamps out of their barns over the winter. Portable heaters and heat lamps are disasters waiting to happen. If heat lamps are needed for veterinary purposes, the animals should be moved to a fire-safe location (for example, a concrete block wash rack) but preferably out of the barn, and someone should be in attendance at all times, regardless of where the heat lamp or portable heater is located.

Visit the Fire Safety in Barns website for suggestions on fire safety in your barn, to ask questions, or to contribute your comments to help others. The deaths from portable heater- and heat lamp-caused barn fires have already started—don't allow it to happen to your animals.

Contact Information

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Keywords

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