

Four steps to help farmers prepare for a disaster

Part three in a series

Since no one can eliminate all on-farm risks such as acts of terrorism, animal or plant disease outbreaks, or natural disasters, farmers must plan how they will handle emergencies they cannot prevent. Preparedness, for some risks, is more important than prevention. The basics of being prepared are contained in the following simple four-step process.

1 Planning

Just as farmers need plans that spell out how they intend to prevent risks, written emergency management plans must involve everyone in your farm operation so you will work together in response to emergencies.

Since you cannot plan for everything, the first step is determining the most likely threats and risks that your business faces. Conducting a threat assessment (see the December issue of *Michigan Farm News*) will provide a list of on-farm emergencies. By identifying which threats are of greatest concern, you can set priorities and make sure you have the best response plans to these threats. Don't forget about disruption or loss of suppliers and/or customers. Emergency plans involve identifying what you, your family, and employees will do in emergency situations, and when and who you will call for help when emergency situations are more than you can handle.

Some actions can prepare farms to respond to a variety of risks and are considered part of "all hazards" planning. For example, having a generator for backup power and fuel to run it for a week can be essential for energy depen-

dent farm operations – regardless whether the power outage was caused by severe weather, an accident, or an attack.

Fortunately, there are many resources available to assist in the planning process. Include your employees, law enforcement officials, veterinarians, Extension agents, insurance providers, and others who can look at your operation from different perspectives. These individuals can not only suggest preventative measures for threats, they can also provide crucial input regarding what information will assist them best if they are among the first responders to an incident on your farm.

2 Training

Once your emergency management plan is in place, it is important to train family members and employees. Remember that you may not be at the farm or business when the emergency or disaster occurs. Therefore, others need to know what to do, and they may need to do relatively unfamiliar tasks under the pressure of a crisis situation. Training should include emergency preventative measures, surveillance of facilities and property, and prevention and identification of animal disease. Informed participants can protect themselves and your operation, increasing the likelihood that your farm will recover from a critical incident.

Supervision of family members and employees is important to continuously assess



and improve their capacity to identify and avert crisis situations. Also remember to inform and train new employees about emergency plans.

Additionally, employees and family members need to know who to call in emergencies. The list of external contacts should include fire, police, Michigan Department of Agriculture, veterinarian, Extension, and local schools (to contact kids). The "Be Aware Be Prepared" placard was developed to help

you communicate this key information to on-farm workers. (Find the placard reproduced in the Nov. 15 issue of *Michigan Farm News*). There should be an internal contact list posted by phones with numbers for owners, managers and family members. Develop a communication plan that outlines where you will meet on the farmstead with employees and family members if power and communications are lost.

3 Drills and exercises

Another key to minimizing the effects to your farm from an emergency is to practice. How certain are you that your family members and farm workers really can perform the steps you intend them to during emergencies? We have all heard the tragic stories of parents who lose their lives rushing into burning buildings attempting to rescue children who have already escaped. Periodic drills and exercises are necessary to assess participants'

understanding of emergency protocols and the completeness of emergency management plans. Just as schools and public buildings periodically practice fire drills – farms should periodically practice emergency response procedures for some of the more likely threats. Drills serve to find potential pitfalls before they become problems, and help to reinforce procedures and teamwork skills.

4 Evaluate

The final step in on-farm emergency planning is to periodically reassess risks and take corrective action. This should be done:

- When new threats are identified
- With new operations or equipment
- With changes in suppliers & customers
- When preventative measures can or should be upgraded.

While maintaining an emergency response plan on your farm is your responsibility, there is a growing network of resources to help you improve this framework. Extension agents, Michigan Department of Agriculture, cooperative and association representatives, and local emergency management coordinators all have experience and perspectives which can be utilized to help protect your operation. By utilizing these linkages you will be aware of issues in farm protection as they develop and be prepared to protect your business from ever-changing threats.

Contributors: Jennifer Sysak (MSU), Dr. Ted Ferris (MSU), John Tilden (MDA), Dr. Mark Hansen (MSU), Dean Ross (MSU), Allen Krizek (MSU).

Emergency management plan – a blueprint for response, recovery

Your emergency management plan is a blueprint to guide your agri-business in its response to and recovery from a threatening situation.

A basic plan includes:

A collection of emergency information – "secured" in a predetermined location and/or given to local emergency responders. Discuss the preferred location with your local responders.

Information should include:

- Emergency contact list (internal and external)
- Farm map (wells, pumps, chemicals flammables, power nodes)
- Locations and amounts of hazardous chemicals, Material Safety Data Sheets for each chemical.
- List of major contents in each building

- An outline of steps to replace or recover critical functions
- List of farm functions and how to recover each.
- Family emergency plans – including employee families
- A plan for extended periods of isolation or an animal/people quarantine
- Evacuation plan for people and animals

Methods for identifying critical functions can be found at:

- MSU School of Criminal Justice – Critical Incident Control
- <http://www.cj.msu.edu/%7Eoutreach/CIP/CIP.pdf>
- <http://www.cj.msu.edu/~outreach/>
- FEMA Web site: <http://www.fema.gov>
- FEMA Independent Study Course IS-111 Livestock in Disasters <http://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/is111lst.asp>
- See MSU Extension Bulletin E-2575, November 2005, at <http://www.pested.msu.edu/BullSlideNews/bulletins/EmergencyFarm.html>.

Planning doesn't eliminate confusion during an emergency, but it will help answer many questions ahead of time. With good planning and communications, farm businesses will be better prepared to reduce the impact of emergencies on their operations and get back to business as quickly as possible.

All farms need emergency plans

Farm managers need to be prepared to respond if an emergency occurs, whether it's due to bioterrorism, a natural disaster or an accident. A farm emergency plan that a manager develops and shares with employees, family members and local emergency responders helps everyone be prepared to deal with the unexpected.

Michigan State University (MSU) Extension and the Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program have a recently updated bulletin called "Emergency Planning for the Farm" (Bulletin E-2575) that can help producers plan for incidents and accidents.

A farm emergency plan contains emergency contact information, farmstead and aerial maps and information for handling fertilizer, pesticide and manure spills, fires and other emergency or suspicious activities. Firefighters, rescue teams and other responders use the plan to determine quickly if any farmstead hazards exist that may deter rescues or endanger human lives.

Every farmer is encouraged to maintain an up-to-date inventory of stored products (pesticides, fertilizers and farm flammables) and their storage locations, along with a list of the farm's and nearby emergency equipment and supplies.

"It is also important for farmers to routinely inspect agri-chemical and equipment

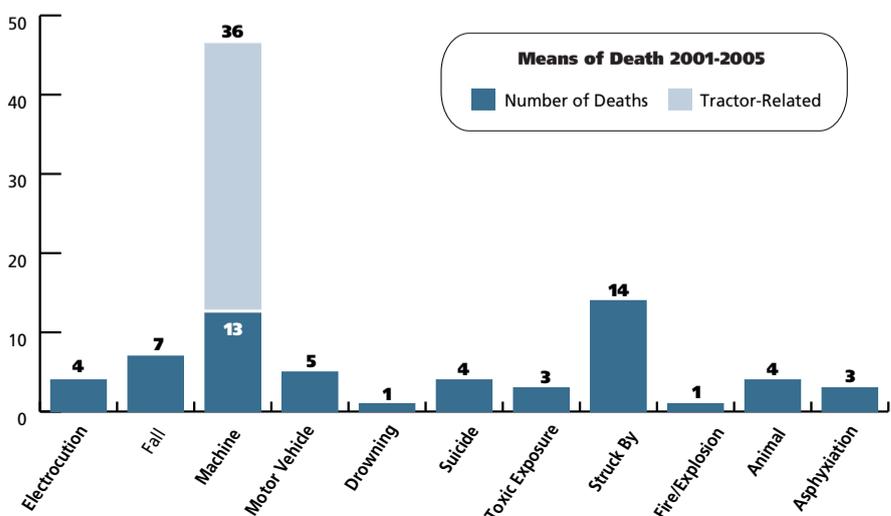
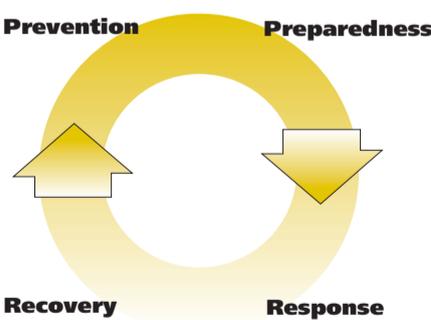
- storages for signs of suspicious activities," said Allen Krizek, MSU Extension liaison for the Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program. "Any evidence of tampering or unauthorized access to any farm buildings or structures should be reported immediately to your local law enforcement agency."

- Updated emergency plans should be dated and filed in at least three locations-- the farm office, in the emergency tube, in farm vehicles/tractors and with the fire department or local emergency planning committee (LEPC). Old versions of the emergency plan must be destroyed to eliminate any possible confusion.

- Plans stored in emergency tubes should be protected from moisture with an air-tight plastic bag, laminated paper or plastic paper (available from office supply stores). Emergency tubes are available from any Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program technician.

- Groundwater technicians can help farm managers develop emergency plans and request one private pesticide applicator recertification credit, for farmers who have not already developed a plan.

- "Emergency Planning for the Farm" is available at no charge from any county MSU Extension office or a Groundwater Stewardship Program technician (usually located in the Conservation District office). The bulletin can also be obtained online at web2.msue.msu.edu/bulletins/Bulletin/PDF/E2575.pdf.



Apply it for your safety

With a basic understanding of emergency preparedness, farm operators now need to develop a list of threats to their facilities and safety. Preventing fatalities should be a high priority in any preparedness program.

The Farm Emergency Preparedness Series: "Understanding Preparedness and Response" will feature seminars throughout Michigan this winter to provide comprehensive training for farm operators to develop their own preparedness plans by understanding the techniques used to identify farm and food safety hazards. Contact your local Farm Bureau office or Craig Anderson at 517-323-7000 for dates and locations.

Once the operation identifies the hazards, owners can assess risk. The probability of something happening on farms is used to determine a management strategy to reduce the risk to an acceptable level.

This risk assessment should use the best information available. For example, the average fatality rate is estimated at 23.8/100,000 people working on farms in Michigan over the last five years. While some would point to youth as the highest risk group, the data provides a different picture.

Based on the actual data, farmers should look at tractor safety issues for middle aged and older family and workers.

From work-related fatality data compiled by the Michigan Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (MIFACE) research program, Michigan State University