

~ BARN FIRES ~

OVERVIEW

In the past several years, there has been a rash of serious barn fires in Canada, causing massive loss of animal life, particularly in Intensive Livestock Operations. Many of the buildings that burned were factory pig barns.

Livestock barn fires are increasing in frequency, yet there are few preventive measures required



Burned sows who attempted to escape their gestation crates during a Manitoba barn fire

because the barns have few human occupants. Animals are not considered “occupants,” yet they suffer horribly in fires, just as humans do. Basic fire prevention measures, including smoke alarms and sprinklers, are not required in the national farm building code.

Fire safety standards for farm buildings are based on human occupancy. Animals in farm buildings are simply not afforded basic fire prevention measures, such as heat and smoke alarms and sprinklers. Animal occupants, too often helplessly confined in cages and crates, die in their cages when a fire breaks out.

Pigs and poultry virtually never escape burning buildings. Animals that are crated and caged require top-notch fire protection, but they do not receive it. Canada’s national fire standards for farm buildings are woefully deficient. Concrete improvements over existing standards are needed. Improved vigilance and preventive measures are also needed. Dust and corrosion in barns contribute to electrical fires which trigger many barn fires, and the highly combustible and explosive

gases of hydrogen sulphide and methane contained in pig waste make barn fires even more hazardous.

THE BARN FIRE CRISIS IN CANADA

In 2008, more than 30,000 pigs died in barn fires in Manitoba alone. As factory farms increase in size, so do the risks to the animals. In the increase in fires across Canada over the past few years is astonishing. In 2007, 3,700 animals lost their lives, in 2008 it was 30,500, and in 2009, the number jumped to 51,900.

Evidence shows that before succumbing to smoke inhalation, pigs in a barn fire are panicked, frantically running and piling in their pens. The sows, completely squished into gestation stalls, attempt

to jump up out of their crates or squeeze through the bars. All of it is, of course, futile. The abdomens of some pregnant sows have exploded in the fires, spilling their internal organs and uteri, which contain piglets in various stages of development.

CCFA and other animal protection groups met with the Office of the Manitoba Fire Commissioner and petitioned for improved standards in the Manitoba fire code for farm buildings.

The resulting Manitoba standards, issued in 2010, call for fire alarms, exit signs and sprinklers only when there are 75 or more employees, which is never the case in animal agriculture operations. Standards specify new agricultural buildings over 600m² will have to be engineered, be equipped with fire breaks, alarms and exit signs.



Burned sows in gestation crates

Proposed standards apply only to new farm buildings or to major renovations, thus retrofitting existing barns is not required. Older Manitoba barns – those most at risk for fire – are not required to meet the new standards.

Furthermore, most intensive livestock operations do not have farm houses nearby, which mean no one is likely to be alerted to fire until it is well underway and has caused destruction and loss to animal life. In order for animals to have any chance of survival, these barns must have smoke sensors and suppression systems built in.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Your action is needed now to end the massive loss of animal lives in Canadian barn fires.

The national code revision process is presently underway, so your input is important *right now*.

Express your concern about the inadequate national standard which does not protect farm animals, by contacting:

The Standing Committee on Fire Protection,
Canadian Codes Center,
Institute for Research in Construction,
National Research Council of Canada,
Building M-23A, 1200 Montreal Road,
Ottawa, ON K1A 0R6

The Honorable Gerry Ritz
Minister of Agriculture
930 Carling Avenue
Ottawa, ON K1A 0C5

For more information, please contact us.

Phone: 1-866-303-CCFA (2232) or (604) 266-9749

Mail: 213-33 Hazelton Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5R 2E3

Email: info@humanefood.ca Or visit our website at www.humanefood.ca