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Hay bales igniting in Morton County

Mandan, N.D. – An alarming number of hay bales being ignited by spontaneous combustion in the area is prompting local fire departments to remind farmers and ranchers to keep a close eye on bales they are moving into storage.

“If you suspect that some hay was baled at a higher than recommended moisture content, leave them out in the field as long as possible and check their moisture and temperature before stacking,” said Mandan Rural Fire Department Chief Lynn Gustin.

Approximately 300 hay bales burned near St. Anthony, another 100 near New Salem and about 10 burned just west of Mandan so far this month. When hay is put into a stack or barn when it has more than about 22 percent moisture, it has an increased risk of spontaneous combustion. High moisture hay stacks can have chemical reactions that build heat.

Grain that was baled for hay due to the drought can be deceiving at baling time and needs to be checked thoroughly before stacking.

The large number of acres of millet and sudan grass hay that are being baled are very difficult to dry down properly and need to be baled in a safe moisture range to store safely. Producers should try to limit the size of their hay stacks and leave several hundred feet in between stacks if at all possible.

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