

Working Safe in Drought Conditions:

Preventing Field Fires During Crop Harvest

Harvesting in dry conditions can spark fires. Machinery, metal blades, and heat all increase risk. Keep your team and your crops safe with smart practices and fast response preparation.

Know the Risk Before you Work

- Check fire weather index and burn restrictions - novascotia.ca/burnsafe
- Avoid harvest work during hottest hours (10 AM–5 PM)
- Delay harvest on windy or gusty days
- Keep water, fire extinguisher, and shovel within reach
- Have a safety zone at the work site that “won’t burn” i.e. gravel landing/plowed area/green field (these are used in case of an event that all you can do is get to somewhere that won’t burn)

Equipment Fire Prevention

- Inspect and maintain mufflers and spark arrestors
- Keep blades sharp to reduce sparks
- Clear dry vegetation and debris from work areas
- Do NOT park hot machinery on dry grass or stubble
- Refuel equipment only when cool and well away from fuel sources
- Keep a tractor & set of disc harrows on site and ready to plow, should any fields catch fire (a single pass can create enough fire break to slow the spread of field crop fire – keep well back from any fire when doing so!)

If You See Smoke or Fire

Call 911 or your local fire department immediately.

Be ready to report:

- Exact location (GPS or landmark or nearest civic number to your location)
- Fire size and direction
- What’s burning (crop, field, machine)
- Nearby risks (barns, roads, powerlines)

General Preparedness

Train all workers on:

- Fire hazards and equipment safety
- Reporting and response procedures
- Evacuation plans for field crews

- Post emergency contacts in every work zone/tractor
- Maintain clear access for fire response vehicles
- Build and store a harvest fire kit (extinguishers, tools, contacts, maps)

Every year, hundreds of wildfires in Canada are sparked by farm equipment during hot, dry weather — often during peak harvest. In Nova Scotia, a single machinery spark in drought conditions can ignite dry vegetation in seconds, leading to significant crop loss and emergency response.

With fire season becoming longer and more intense, it’s essential that farmers remain alert, plan for worst-case scenarios, and take steps to reduce ignition risks. Your caution during harvest protects lives, livelihoods, and the land you work so hard to care for.

