

NewsWatch

Hot hay

By KIM ROBERTS

TRAVELERS on Interstate 90 through Ellensburg, Wash., witnessed the fiery destruction of a hay staging shed at Calaway Trading Inc. in mid-January.

The owner-operated company has specialized in exporting hay and other feed commodities to Asia since its inception in 1987. The fire destroyed the 45,000-square-foot steel structure built in 1991.

Owner Jeff Calaway says, "It's one of those things you have nightmares about and hope never happens. The blessing is that no one was injured."

Calaway lost 2,400 tons of hay committed to overseas customers in Japan and Korea.

The operation normally runs day and night. However, the fire occurred during a slow time for the business, and the usual crew was not working that evening. Calaway credits this as the reason no one was injured. "If they had been here, they would have tried to fight the fire themselves," he says.

A mechanic on the property, though not in the building, saw the fire's glow and called 911.

An initial response team of 36 personnel from Kittitas Valley Fire and Rescue fought the blaze for four hours. Once stabilized, smaller fire suppression crews remained on the scene for three days.

Agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives cleared the scene within days with "no determination of cause." Later, on Jan. 28, Kittitas County Fire Marshal



BURNED OUT: A hay fire caused by spontaneous ignition continued to burn at Calaway Trading Co. in Ellensburg, Wash., for days after it began. Damage was estimated at \$1.5 million, but no one was injured in the blaze.

Key Points

- Washington hay fire caused by spontaneous ignition.
- Good building separation prevented heavier losses.
- Monitoring hay moisture is a must for fire prevention.

Brenda Larson declared the fire's cause as "spontaneous ignition."

Larson says investigators found an "unusually large clinker" leading them to this determination. (A clinker is the fusion of materials at the fire's source resulting in a glass nodule. In a spontaneous ignition fire, material does not con-

tain incendiary residue.)

The shed's structure and contents were insured; however, losses are estimated at upward of \$1.5 million. Calaway Trading maintains detailed maps of its buildings, including inventory. The company lost timothy, alfalfa, oat and orchard grass hay along with rye grass straw.

Workers check their products for moisture regularly to prevent this type of disaster.

Rich Elliott, deputy chief of

Kittitas Valley Fire and Rescue, says, "The employees were instrumental in moving hazardous materials and equipment away from the building." He notes this is the best way to assist firefighters after calling 911.

He further recommends hay storage owners to "actively monitor moisture control and separate any water-damaged hay" in order to prevent spontaneous ignition incidents.

Elliott adds the fire may not

have been easily controllable because it occurred on a warm, windy day.

However, he credits the company's use of metal siding and sufficient spacing between buildings as helping to contain the fire. Because of this, two other steel structures and two steel-frame tarp structures owned by Calaway were spared.

Roberts writes from Aberdeen, Wash.

Weed-fighting advice given to save hard-won herbicides

By T.J. BURNHAM

DESPITE the high cost of bringing new compounds to farmers, "it's fun to work with agriculture," said a Syngenta Crop Protection Inc. manager.

Citing the long process needed to develop new herbicides, where 100,000 selections may yield only two for commercialization, weed resistance brand manager Chuck Foresman had a strong message for agriculture.

"We are trying to develop a message to farmers to use integrated management practices" to protect hard-won new products from weed re-

Key Points

- Syngenta weed official urges major fight against resistance.
- It takes \$200 million, 10 years to bring a herbicide to market.
- Rampant resistance in the South should be lesson to West.

sistance, said Foresman at the Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association's annual conference.

Seeing resistance develop from overuse is a discouraging trend for chemicals that cost \$200 million and 10 years to bring to the market, he said.

Glyphosate is meeting with resistant weeds in 20 states,

noted Foresman. "You really must rotate chemistry in the field," he said. "This is a great technology, which controls 170 weeds, and we need to sustain it."

But when using herbicides, he urged that the full legal label rate be applied — a timely remark today as growers attempt to cut corners by reducing herbicide rates.

The problem with reducing recommended rates is that the product may control 90% of the weeds in a field rather than 100%, he explained. Those surviving weeds become more tolerant and may develop resistance to "these precious tools," he warned.

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