



AGRABILITY CHIT CHAT

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FIRE SAFETY

CONTENTS:

- CARM'S COMMENTS: Carmen Schacht
- EMERGENCY PLANNING: Erin Haafke and Ed Bell
- FIRE SAFETY BASICS: Steve Freeman and Erin Haafke
- RESOURCES
- IN THE NEWS
- COW-CALF CONFERENCE
- NEWSLETTER THOUGHTS: Erin Haafke

CARM'S COMMENTS: Carmen Schacht

First, I wish all of you a Happy New Year!

Wintertime is a prime time for fires. In the news for our area in the last few weeks were stories of two home fires caused by wood-burning stoves. I hope that all of you who burn wood will be sure to take extra precautions to make sure you are safe. One important thing to remember with a furnace is to keep its surroundings clear of clutter. In addition, it is important that you have smoke detectors on each level of your home.

Let's all make it a priority to be as safety-conscious as we can be during these cold winter days and be careful not to create situations that could cause a fire. Have a safe New Year.

EMERGENCY PLANNING: Erin Haafke and Ed Bell

Emergency planning is important for rural people with disabilities.

Over 21 years have passed since Ed Bell survived a violent attack. In 1982 he sustained a gunshot wound which left him permanently paralyzed below his collarbones, resulting in quadriplegia. After months of intensive therapy, he was able to regain most of the use in his arms and hands. With a close working relationship with the Indiana AgrAbility Project, Breaking New Ground, Ed was able to continue his farming operation by modifying his equipment. Ed transitioned from raising pigs and started growing produce and truck crops to better accommodate his disability. Throughout much of the 1980s, Ed grew many acres of sweet corn, green beans and assorted vegetables which he sold retail out of an old barn on his farm. Since 1985, Ed Bell and his family have been raising strawberries on the Indiana farmland that had been in his family for decades.

A fire breaking out in a home is never a welcome thought to any family, but when a family member has a disability, emergency planning takes on a greater level of importance. Ed and his family were prepared in case a fire was to ever breakout in their home. Did they expect it? Hardly.

AGRABILITY CHIT CHAT

Nevertheless, on a gorgeous fall evening in 1995 the Bell family's pre-1822 two-story log home caught fire as the result of an electrical short powering a clothes dryer.

Exhausted from a hard day's work on a tractor, Ed had already retired to bed, while his wife Debbie was finishing up the dinner dishes, and their three year old daughter Nellie was watching, of all things, "Barney's Fire Safety" video. Nellie spotted the fire first that began near the enclosed back porch and told Debbie, "Mommy, fire!" Naturally Debbie thought she was talking about the video, but soon noticed the back porch and part of the living room engulfed in flames!

Debbie told Ed to call the fire department. Not seeing the flames, Ed's pride stepped in and he told Debbie to just use their kitchen fire extinguisher. Debbie, with Nellie on her hip, began shutting doors and opened the window to their bedroom and exited her way out of their home. It was then that Ed knew his family's emergency fire plan had been implemented and that the flames were well beyond amateur fire fighting. Ed then called the fire department and quickly started making his way out, too. These were the first steps assuring the Bell's safe escape from their burning home.

Once little Nellie was safely out of the burning home, Debbie remained outdoors to assure their daughter's safety and to help direct the firefighters to Ed's location. The family's only accessible entrance was up in flames, so they took advantage of an unused side door nearby with a three-foot drop off to the outside. Ed was able to transfer out of his manual wheelchair into the doorway. Debbie then pulled his empty wheelchair out into the yard which provided Ed a safe transfer back into his chair and allowed him to get away from the burning house. The fire department arrived, yet by the time the fire was put out, the kitchen, living room, bathroom, and porch were gutted. Although

the house was a loss, the Bell's were safe and sound and many of their possessions could be saved to furnish a newer more accessible home over a year later.

There were several key steps that the Bell family took to ensure their safety that frightful evening in October. They made plans to get out; they practiced them, and told neighbors about their plan. They knew the number to call the fire department and made sure that the local fire department knew about Ed's disability. Additionally, the Bell's had working smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, and a bedroom and bathroom on the first floor, which provided an easier exit for Ed.

Ed's advice to anyone with a disability is to follow his family's example by making a plan for a safe exit. He also suggests putting aside an emergency kit containing at least three day's worth of medicines and disability related supplies. Ed suggested leaving the emergency kit with a relative, a friend, or in a vehicle. He had these supplies at his parent's home nearby, which was helpful because of his unique losses in the fire. For insurance purposes, he suggests that you inventory your supplies and equipment in case of a loss. Keep a record of expensive wheelchairs and assistive devices with your insurance company. Ed also suggests that you discuss with your family some accessible lodging options in the event of an emergency.

The Bell's miss the character and charm of their old rural Hoosier home but they enjoy the access and comfort their new home provides. Most importantly, the Bell's continue to practice their family's emergency preparedness plans that once saved their lives. Ed continues to keep busy as a family man, a farmer, a consultant for the Standing Wheelchair Company, and he travels the country as a motivational speaker. You may contact Ed Bell at:

AGRABILITY CHIT CHAT

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Fax: 765 489 6136
Relay 711
Email: edbell@ruraltek.com
www.eatmorestrawberries.com

FIRE SAFETY BASICS: Steve Freeman and Erin Haafke

Fire injuries are usually caused by human failure. Our failure to perceive that fires are possible and are a danger to us (we like to believe that fires only happen to other people). Our failure to take preventive measures to decrease the likelihood of fires occurring. And our failure to prepare a plan of action for how we will respond if a fire does occur. The Bell's survived their fire experience without injury because Ed and Debbie had recognized the threat and were prepared to respond if they needed to. This is especially important for people with disabilities because of potential physical limitations and decreased ability to react in an emergency. Ed Bell's story of his family's emergency plan gives hints on fire safety for people with disabilities. Below are some essentials to help plan for a fire emergency:

Install and maintain smoke detectors. It is estimated that 90% of people who die in residential fires die from smoke and gas inhalation before the fire department is even called. By the time your neighbors (if you have neighbors) see smoke, it is too late. If you are sleeping you will not smell the smoke; the carbon dioxide in the smoke will have an anesthetic effect putting you in a deeper sleep. Fires demand immediate response and the best way to be warned of a fire so that you can respond is to have working smoke detectors.

- Special alarms are available for the deaf and hard of hearing
- One alarm is recommended for each level of your home and in each sleeping area
- See that alarms are tested monthly and have the battery changed yearly

Live near an exit

- Sleep on the ground floor for access to the exit and easier escape

Plan your escape around your capabilities

- Know two exits from every room
- Check exits to see if your assistive devices are able to get through the doorways
- Make essential accommodations to enable an escape

Don't isolate yourself

- Speak to your family and neighbors about your plan and practice it with them.
- Contact your local fire department and explain your special needs
- Ask them to keep your information on file
- Keep a phone near your bed to call for help if a fire occurs

Eliminate fire hazards

- Never leave something cooking on the stove unattended
- Do not overload electrical circuits
- Have your furnace inspected annually
- Maintain a minimum of three feet between combustibles (curtains, clothes, furniture, etc.) and supplemental heating sources such as fireplaces, woodstoves, and portable heaters

For additional information contact the U.S. Fire administration as listed below.

AGRABILITY CHIT CHAT

RESOURCES

Fire Safety

U.S. Fire Administration
16825 S. Seton Ave.
Emmitsburg, MD 21727
Voice: (301) 447-1000
FAX: (301) 447-1052
www.usfa.fema.gov/index.shtm

IN THE NEWS

Iowa Farmland Value Reaches Record High: (excerpts from article written by Michael Duffy, ISU Extension farm economist and Del Marks, Continuing Education and Communication Services)

The average value of an acre of farmland in Iowa reached \$2,275 in 2003, the highest figure reported since Iowa State University began conducting an annual survey of land values in 1941. Values of farmland increased in all 99 counties and the average value for the state increased for the fourth year in a row. According to Duffy, low interest rates, demand created by investors, scarcity of land on the market, and the impact of government payments were all factors in value increases this year. Factors that kept prices down were weather, general uncertainty, and low soybean yields. For the complete article go to www.extension.iastate.edu/newsrel/2003/dec03/dec0319.html

COW-CALF CONFERENCE

The Cornbelt Cow-Calf Conference focuses on management and production practices that apply to the cow-calf industry and brings researchers and practical cattle producers together to “explore” current topics and issues. It will be held at the Coliseum in Ottumwa, Iowa on February 28th, 2004. Registration begins at 7:30am and the conference concludes at 3:45pm. A \$6 registration fee includes lunch and a copy of conference proceedings. Contact Wapello County Extension at 641-682-5491 or Byron Leu at 641-472-4166.

NEWSLETTER THOUGHTS: Erin Haafke

March Madness will be the theme of the March 2004 newsletter. Do you hunt or play basketball from your wheelchair? Do you play golf, go swimming, or enjoy horseback riding? Do you attend every game in Hilton Coliseum or Carver Hawkeye Arena? I know that many of you are sports nuts – so “strut your stuff” and let me know what you’re up to! Please call or email me with your sports stories or activities. I would be happy to write your remarks, suggestions, and experiences for others to learn from or be encouraged by in the upcoming Chit Chat Newsletter! My phone number is 515-294-8522 or send me an email at ehaafke@iastate.edu.

AGRABILITY CHIT CHAT

IOWA AGRABILITY - A joint effort of ISU Extension and the Rural Solutions Program of Easter Seals Iowa. The program can help farm family members with a disability stay in farming.

This newsletter from the Iowa AgrAbility Project will be sent monthly to AgrAbility families and other interested individuals. Please send comments and suggestions to:

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TDD: 1-800-854-1658.
Web site: www.extension.iastate.edu/agrability/

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Iowa AgrAbility Project

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