



Glenn Youngkin  
Governor

Caren Merrick  
Secretary of  
Commerce and Trade

# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Bryan W. Horn  
Director

October 2023

### Memorandum

**To:** Board of Housing and Community Development Members

**From:** Agritourism Event Structure Technical Advisory Committee

**RE:** Best Practices for New Safety Measures

### **Background**

[SB1305](#) (2023), as approved by the General Assembly and signed by the Governor, directed the Agritourism Event Structure Technical Advisory Committee to continue its efforts first established by [SB400](#) (2022). The legislation requires the Committee to meet at least four times during 2023 to continue considering issues of concern regarding fire safety and the welfare of the general public at agritourism facilities. Additionally, the new legislation implemented three new requirements for farm buildings and structures that are open to the general public for agritourism activities ([§ 36-99.B.](#)). The new requirements went into effect July 1, 2023, and are as follows:

1. *Portable fire extinguishers for the purpose of fire suppression;*
2. *A simple written plan in case of an emergency, but shall not be construed to be interpreted as a fire evacuation plan under the Uniform Statewide Building Code or any local requirements; and*
3. *A sign posted in a conspicuous place upon entry to the farm building or structure that states that "This building is EXEMPT from the Uniform Statewide Building Code. Be alert to exits in the event of a fire or other emergencies." Such sign shall be placed in a clearly visible location near the entrance to such farm building or structure. The notice shall consist of a sign no smaller than 24 inches by 36 inches with clearly legible black letters, with each letter to be a minimum of one inch in height.*

During the Committee's meeting on June 14, 2023, committee members reported that affected facilities attempting to comply with the new requirements do not know how to do so because the requirement to have a portable fire extinguisher and have a simple written emergency plan do not provide enough detail as currently stated in State Code. The Committee agreed the third new requirement regarding the posting of a sign stating the facility's exemption from the Uniform



Statewide Building Code (USBC) is currently detailed and specific enough for a facility to comply. Considering the impending July 1 effective date, committee members expressed concern regarding the lack of specificity in complying with the new requirements and began discussing best practices for compliance with the new requirements.

The following best practices were developed by the Committee and stakeholders to provide non-binding guidance for facilities seeking to comply with the new requirements imposed by §36-99.B. While the committee has generally agreed on the contents of the best practices, it has not taken formal action to adopt or endorse the best practices. These recommended best practices are offered in the absence of other federal, state, or local requirements imposed on facilities subject to §36-99.B and pertaining to portable fire extinguishers and simple written emergency plans.

### Best Practices

In the absence of federal, state, or local requirements pertaining to the measures specified in §36-99.B.1 and 36-99.B.2 of the Code of Virginia, the Agritourism Event Structure Technical Advisory Committee (the Committee) offers the following best practices for fulfilling the requirements related to portable fire extinguishers and a simple written emergency plan as stated in §36-99.B.1. and 36-99.B.2. These best practices are non-binding in nature and are to be used as guidance to ensure fire safety and the welfare of the general public at agritourism facilities.

#### *36-99.B.1. Portable fire extinguishers for the purpose of fire suppression*

The Committee suggests several resources for facilities to reference in order to comply with the requirement to have “portable fire extinguishers for the purpose of fire suppression.” Compliance with this requirement may include the following elements:

#### Fire Extinguishers For Class A Fire Hazards

|  | Ordinary (Moderate) Hazard Occupancy |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Minimum-rated single extinguisher          | 2-A                                  |
| Maximum floor area per unit of A           | 1,500 sqft.                          |
| Maximum floor area for extinguisher        | 11,250 sqft.                         |
| Maximum distance of travel to extinguisher | 75 ft.                               |

Conspicuous Location- Portable fire extinguishers may be located in conspicuous locations where they will have ready access and be immediately available for use. These locations may be along normal paths of travel, unless the hazard posed indicates the need for placement away from normal paths of travel.

Unobstructed and Unobscured- Portable fire extinguishers may not be obstructed or obscured from view. In rooms or areas in which visual obstruction cannot be completely avoided, means may be provided to indicate the locations of extinguishers.



Hangers and Brackets- Hand-held portable fire extinguishers, not housed in cabinets, may be installed on the hangers or brackets supplied. Hangers or brackets may be securely anchored to the mounting surface in accordance with the manufacturer's installation instructions.

Cabinets- Cabinets used to house portable fire extinguishers may not be locked.

Extinguisher Installation- Portable fire extinguishers having a gross weight not exceeding 40 pounds (18 kg) may be installed so that their tops are not more than 5 feet (1524 mm) above the floor. Hand-held portable fire extinguishers having a gross weight exceeding 40 pounds (18 kg) may be installed so that their tops are not more than 3.5 feet (1067 mm) above the floor. The clearance between the floor and the bottom of installed hand-held portable fire extinguishers may be not less than 4 inches (102 mm).

Wheeled Units- Wheeled fire extinguishers may be conspicuously located in a designated location.

Maintenance- Portable fire extinguishers should be inspected at least annually and maintained in compliance with the manufacturer's recommendations.

*36-99.B.2 A simple written plan in case of an emergency, but shall not be construed to be interpreted as a fire evacuation plan under the Uniform Statewide Building Code or any local requirements*

The Committee suggests several resources as best practices for complying with “a simple written plan in case of an emergency.” The plan may include the following elements:

Virginia Farm Emergency Plan- published by the Virginia Cooperative Extension ([here](#))

- Contact information for the following:
  - Facility’s ownership and/or management
  - Emergency services
  - Specific phone numbers for the operation of the facility
  - Farm operations primary and secondary contacts
- Directions to the facility from all major highways/roads, including a map of the property with major landmarks highlighted
- Facility site information including:
  - Physical address
  - GPS coordinates
  - Chemical storage address
  - E911 Addresses
- Frequent walkthroughs and operational checks
- Records updated annually
- Employee information including:
  - CPR and First Aid training certifications
  - Medical requirements



Fire Evacuation Plans- fire evacuation plans may include the following:

- Emergency egress or escape routes and whether evacuation of the building is to be complete by selected floors or areas only or with a defend-in-place response.
- Procedures for employees who must remain to operate critical equipment before evacuating.
- Procedures for the use of elevators to evacuate the building where occupant evacuation elevators are provided.
- Procedures for assisted rescue for persons unable to use the general means of egress unassisted.
- Procedures for accounting for employees and occupants after evacuation has been completed.
- Identification and assignment of personnel responsible for rescue or emergency medical aid.
- The preferred and any alternative means of notifying occupants of a fire or emergency.
- The preferred and any alternative means of reporting fires and other emergencies to the fire department or designated emergency response organization.
- Identification and assignment of personnel who can be contacted for further information or explanation of duties under the plan.
- A description of the emergency voice/alarm communication system alert tone and preprogrammed voice messages, where provided.

Fire Safety Plans- fire safety plans may include the following:

- The procedure for reporting a fire or other emergency.
- The life safety strategy including the following:
  - Procedures for notifying occupants, including areas with a private mode alarm system.
  - Procedures for occupants under a defend-in-place response.
  - Procedures for evacuating occupants, including those who need evacuation assistance.
- Site plans indicating the following:
  - The occupancy assembly point.
  - The locations of fire hydrants.
  - The normal routes of fire department vehicle access.
- Floor plans identifying the locations of the following:
  - Exits.
  - Primary evacuation routes.
  - Secondary evacuation routes.
  - Accessible egress routes.
    - Areas of refuge.
    - Exterior areas for assisted rescue.
  - Refuge areas associated with smoke barriers and horizontal exits.
  - Manual fire alarm boxes.



- Portable fire extinguishers.
- Occupant-use hose stations.
- Fire alarm annunciators and controls.
- A list of major fire hazards associated with the normal use and occupancy of the premises, including maintenance and housekeeping procedures.
- Identification and assignment of personnel responsible for maintenance of systems and equipment installed to prevent or control fires.
- Identification and assignment of personnel responsible for maintenance, housekeeping and controlling fuel hazard sources.





## Virginia Farm Emergency Plan

*Authored by Livvy Priesser, Unit Coordinator and Extension Agent, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Isle of Wight County, Virginia Cooperative Extension*

### What is a Farm Emergency Plan and why should you create one?

The purpose of a Farm Emergency Plan is to help agricultural operations proactively prepare for management of unexpected hazardous situations. A thorough and current Farm Emergency Plan can help minimize first responder response times and assist with site location accuracy during an emergency. Farm Emergency Plans should be utilized as well communicated training tools for operational employees, family members, etc. If done properly, a Farm Emergency Plan could be one of the most effective and invaluable tools to have around.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics found that agriculture activities are among the 34 deadliest jobs in the United States. Farming is a hazardous job and in 2019, Virginia reported three fatalities throughout the state due to farm incidents according to Virginia Farm Bureau. Our program team has put together resources to help encourage farm safety and wellness for all farm families by compiling a Farm Emergency Plan to help farmers ensure they are prepared in the event of an on-farm emergency.

### Where should you store your plan?

Once you have thoroughly completed a Farm Emergency Plan, it is important that all necessary parties are provided convenient access. The plan should be stored in multiple locations and be available in various formats if possible. Suggested places include in the tractor(s), combine(s), truck(s), pesticide storage shed, office, and/or any other central location where employees congregate. Laminating or keeping the plan in a binder/folder will help with the durability of the plan. It is important to share this information with employees, family members, and local first responders (police, EMS, and fire). If the operation is multilingual, all should be covered in the plan. Lastly, the plan should be updated annually and reviewed with new employees.

### Who should have access to it?

All farm employees and family members should have access to this plan. This plan should be kept in several different locations for easy access. We also suggest sharing this plan with your local first responders as well.

The following is a template:

**Farm Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date Completed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**About the Farm**

| <b>Farm Employers</b>  | <b>Name</b> | <b>Phone Number</b> | <b>Email</b> |
|------------------------|-------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Owner/Manager          |             |                     |              |
| Vice President/Manager |             |                     |              |
| Other Workers          |             |                     |              |

**If you have an emergency, call 911. If 911 does not work, please contact:**

| <b>Departments</b>                                 | <b>Contact Numbers</b> |
|--|------------------------|
| Local Fire Department                              |                        |
| Local Emergency Medical Services                   |                        |
| Sheriff  |                        |
| Animal Control                                     |                        |
| Virginia State Police                              | (800) 674-2000         |
| Local Hospital                                     |                        |
| Local or Family Doctor                             |                        |
| Veterinarian (Small and Large Animal)              |                        |
| Local VDACS Pesticide Investigator                 |                        |
| Virginia Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) | (804) 786-3501         |
| VDACS Pesticide Division                           | (804) 786-3798         |
| Virginia Poison Control                            | (800) 222-1222         |
| National Response Center                           | (800) 424- 8802        |
| National Suicide Prevention Line                   | (800) 273-8255         |

## Directions to the farm from all major highways/roads

Include a map of your farm with fields or land worked highlighting major landmarks. Inc.

---

---

---

---

## Specific Numbers for your operation

| Departments                                | Contact Numbers |
|--|-----------------|
| Fire Department/Chief                      |                 |
| EMS/EMS Coordinator                        |                 |
| Gas Company                                |                 |
| Electric Company                           |                 |
| Farm Mechanic                              |                 |
| Chemical Dealer                            |                 |
| Equipment Dealer                           |                 |
| Local Virginia Cooperative Extension Agent |                 |
| Loan Officer                               |                 |
| Insurance Agent                            |                 |
| Farm Service Agency                        |                 |
| Family Doctor                              |                 |
| Family Therapist                           |                 |
| Other                                      |                 |
| Other                                      |                 |



## Farm Operation - Primary Contact Information

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Name                   |  |
| Address                |  |
| Daytime Phone Number   |  |
| Nighttime Phone Number |  |
| Email                  |  |
| Other?                 |  |

## Farm Operation- Secondary Contact Information

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Name                   |  |
| Address                |  |
| Daytime Phone Number   |  |
| Nighttime Phone Number |  |
| Email                  |  |
| Other?                 |  |

## Farm Site

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Farm Physical Address    |  |
| Farm GPS Coordinates     |  |
| Chemical Storage Address |  |
| Other                    |  |

# What else should I know or include in my emergency plan?

- **Operation Layout**

Please include a map or layout of the operation in the plan. Include all land owned, rented, or worked with all the main highways marked. If you operate a U-pick or agritourism operation, it would be helpful to share these layouts with local first responders (fire, EMS, and police). Please mark all major landmarks on the map such as ponds, chemical storage, septic/wastewater, powerlines, grain bins/silos, first aid kits, fire extinguishers, and any other needed emergency documentation.

- **E911 Addresses**

Include all E911 addresses of your farm and rented land within your plan.

- **Walkthroughs**

It is always good to do frequent operational checks and document if/when deficiencies are addressed.

- **Updating Records**

Make sure the plan is updated annually! Update all numbers to reflect any changes in businesses, veterinarians, etc. Also, update locations of farm land or rented land to reflect safe entrances, etc.

- **CPR and First Aid**

**If any employee is trained in CPR or first aid, please add that to your plan.**

- **Medical Requirements**

If any employee has specific medical requirements, please address that as well (latex, asthma, food or medicine allergies, etc.).

- **Customize**

This farm emergency plan is very basic, so please customize to your operation and your needs.

**For questions about how to use or update your farm emergency plan, please contact Livvy Preisser at [livvy16@vt.edu](mailto:livvy16@vt.edu) or 757-365-6261.**

Funding provided by the “Reducing Human & Financial Risk for Beginning, Military Veteran, & Historically Underserved Farmers through Farm Stress, Wellness, & Safety Education” project of the Southern Extension Risk Management Education Center in partnership with the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition and AgrAbility Virginia Program.



SOUTHERN  
EXTENSION  
RISK  
MANAGEMENT  
EDUCATION



VIRGINIA  
Beginning Farmer & Rancher  
COALITION PROGRAM

Visit Virginia Cooperative Extension: [ext.vt.edu](http://ext.vt.edu)

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Edwin J. Jones, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg; M. Ray McKinnie, Administrator, 1890 Extension Program, Virginia State University, Petersburg. 2020 ALCE-219NP