

Use Heat Lamps for Your Pets with Caution

Every year, dozens of pets and farm animals are killed after heat lamps that are meant to keep them warm during cold periods catch fire. Besides the avoidable deaths of the animals, these fires can often burn down an entire home or barn, causing hundreds of thousands of dollars (or more) in damage.

In May 2023, a fire that caused nearly \$225,000 worth of damage to a two-story farmhouse in Matteson Township, Michigan, was attributed to a heating lamp that caught fire.

In April 2023, a duck coop in a Santa Rosa, Calif. backyard caught fire after a heat lamp sparked combustible materials. The fire spread to a nearby home, causing \$270,000 in damage. That same month in Santa Rosa, a heat lamp ignited straw in a garage, killing a number of chicks and a lamb.

In February 2021, a dog being warmed outdoors by a heat lamp in Houma, LA died in a fire that broke out when the lamp overheated. That same month, a fire caused by an overheated heat lamp in a barn in neighboring Bossier Parish killed seven horses.

The above cases illustrate the importance of not leaving heating lamps unattended and keeping them away from flammable materials like bedding and hay.

If you are using heating lamps, farm safety experts recommend:

- **Securing heat lamps with non-flammable hangers** — Consider hanging the lamp from a chain with a locking chain connect to keep the lamp from falling into bedding. Avoid using rope or relying on an extension cord to hang the lamp. If any lamps are permanent fixtures, you should make sure they are secured.
- **Not skimping on lamps** — Look for high-quality, heavy-duty lamps that use thick glass bulbs that won't break and start a fire if they fall. Shop around.
- **Keeping the heat lamp clean** — Clean off dust, cobwebs and dead insects. Inspect before each use.
- **Regularly inspecting lamps** — Look for any frayed or exposed wiring, loose or broken bulbs before plugging in the lamp.
- **Not using extension cords** — Plug the heat lamp directly into a socket. Avoid extension cords as animals' feet can get caught up in it and bring down the lamp. Outlet receptacles should be both ground fault and arc fault, which can help prevent fire from a spark or electrocution if an animal chews on the wire.
- **Keeping a fire extinguisher** — You should have a fire extinguisher that is ABC rated near any heat lamp, ready to use in case of a fire.

The best option is to avoid a heat lamp altogether. *Off the Grid News* recommends:

Timing grooming and treatments — Don't shear or trim your animals' coats when cold weather is on its way, to provide them with additional warmth.

Providing clean, dry bedding — To keep it dry, clean out waste daily or every other day and then apply fresh shavings, straw or litter.

Letting them share space — Animals will often naturally group together for warmth.

Let them find warmth on their own, and they will seek out warm parts of a barn or stand in a sunny area to get warm. They may even seek out spaces against buildings that reflect the sun.

Using livestock curtains in doorways — Livestock supply companies sell vertical strips of heavy plastic that can hang in doorways, creating a barrier against wind and rain, while still allowing the animals to move freely and ventilating the barn. The curtain can also help keep the interior warm.

The takeaway

If an animal bumps into a heat lamp or chews on the cord, a fire can easily ensue. If you use heat lamps to keep your pets or livestock warm, you have to make sure that you check them multiple times a day.

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