

News From Your County Agent
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Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
Zavala County

Temperatures hovering just above freezing on Sunday morning got many of us into the spirit of the holidays, and some scrambling to check and see if their heating units worked (Please see home heating safety in this week's tip of the week) and some digging into the closets to find warmer apparel to wear and stay warm. Of course, typical Southwest Texas weather provided temperatures that were very comfortable by the afternoon so I hope all of you had a chance to enjoy it. I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for reading this week and wishing all of you a very joyous and wonderful Thanksgiving week with friends and family. As we gather for this traditional feast let us also take time to remember all those that are less fortunate than us. HAPPY THANKSGIVING

Upcoming CEU Opportunity For Pesticide License Holders

Mark your calendars for the annual Zavala County Pesticide applicators training opportunity will take place on December 28, 2016 at the La Pryor High School Auditorium in La Pryor, Texas. This annual event is sponsored by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, the La Pryor Independent School District in collaboration with the Texas Department of Agriculture and the Zavala County AgriLife Extension Service Leadership Advisory Board. Commercial, private and non-commercial pesticide applicator license holders will be able to obtain 6 CEU's at this event, 3 general, 1 laws and regulations, 1 in integrated pest management (IPM) and 1 in drift minimization. Registration will begin at 8:30 a.m. and the program will begin at 9:00 a.m. Private pesticide applicators are required to obtain 15 CEU's in 5 years to keep their license active while commercial, non-commercial applicator license holders must obtain 5 CEU's every year to keep their license valid. For more information about this event or if you plan to attend contact the Zavala County Office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883 or by e-mail at mj-valdez@tamu.edu.

Referendum to Establish a Texas Grain Indemnity Fund

The Texas Legislature has acted to allow the Texas Commissioner of Agriculture to conduct a referendum whether to establish a grain indemnity fund for the state of Texas. What is Texas Grain Producer indemnity Fund? The purpose of the fund is to indemnify corn, grain sorghum, wheat and soybean producers as a result of the failure of a grain buyer. If passed, producers of these four crops would pay 0.2% of the gross sales price of grain to the Texas Grain Producers Indemnity Board. Assessments would begin February 1, 2017.

Who is Eligible to Vote? Persons eligible to vote are landowners and producers who have produced corn, grain sorghum, wheat, or soybeans in the last 36 months preceding the close of voting. Where Will Voting Take Place? Voting will be held at local Texas A&M AgriLife Extension County offices from December 5 through 9, 2016. Where Can You Get More Information? Additional information about the Grain Indemnity Fund Referendum is available from the Texas Department of Agriculture, either by contacting Stuart Strnad at (512) 463-3285, or visiting their website, <https://www.texasagriculture.gov/Home/ProductionAgriculture/TexasGrainProducersIndemnityBoard>. Information is also available from the Texas Grain Producers Indemnity Board, (806) 763-0327 or their website, <http://www.texasgrainindemnity.org/>. NOTE:

This information about this election is intended for informational and educational purposes only. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Zavala County or this newspaper do not endorse, in anyway this referendum.

Tip of the Week: Home Heating Safety

With the cold snap experience in our area over the weekend many folks were scrambling to see if their heaters and heating units were in working order to provide heat. Heating equipment is the leading cause of home fires during the fall and winter months. Two of three reported home heating fires and associated deaths and injuries involved portable and fixed space heaters and related equipment, such as fireplaces and chimneys. The first tip is to begin by inspecting your heating equipment before the first cold spell when you will need to use the equipment. For the Zavala County area it is recommended that you check or have a professional service your heating equipment the day after Halloween.

Baseboard Heaters: Check baseboard heaters often and remove objects that have fallen on top or near the heater. Keep all furniture a safe distance from your heaters. Never block the flow of heat. Never permit electrical cords to drape across heaters. Always hire an experienced electrician to do any necessary repair work on your baseboard heaters.

Portable Heaters: When shopping for portable heater, choose a model that has temperature controls, with an automatic turn-off device, and A seal of approval from an independent testing laboratory, indicating that it has met basic safety standards. Keep portable heaters three feet away from anything that can burn. Always place portable heaters on flat surfaces. Always turn the heater off when you leave the room or go to sleep. Avoid using household extension cords with portable heaters. If you have to use an extension cord, make certain that it is a heavy duty cord.

Fireplaces and wood stoves: Always use fire screens to contain sparks. Never burn rubbish, trash or tar covered posts and wood. Make certain anything flammable is kept at a safe distance away from the fire. Never leave fires unattended, especially in areas used by children or pets. Clean out the ashes when cool and place in a metal container.

Remember that with fire or flame heating equipment another potential danger of home heating is carbon monoxide poisoning. If you have any of your heating equipment or appliances that burn fuel such as propane, natural gas, fuel oil, wood, coal or pellets you should install a carbon monoxide detector. In fact the National Safety Board recommends that homes heated with open flame equipment should have both a fire detector and a carbon monoxide detector in good working conditions located at strategic locations in the home.

If you use electricity to heat your home, there are also some maintenance and safety issues to consider as well. Most of these electrical heating equipment in our area are the air source heat pumps which are ideal for mild and moderate climate regions like ours here in the Zavala County region, where the winter temperatures usually remain above 30°F.

Remember not to manually set back a heat pump's thermostat at night. Without a thermostat

specifically designed for heat pump set-back, the electric resistance backup heat will engage when the thermostat is raised in the morning, resulting in much higher energy consumption.

Clean or change filters once a month or as needed, and maintain the system according to manufacturer's instructions. Filter and coil maintenance have a dramatic impact on system performance and service life. Dirty filters, coils, and fans reduce airflow through the system. Reduced airflow decreases system performance and can lead to compressor damage if it continues for an extended period.

Clean and lubricate the fan motor annually to ensure the required airflow is provided for proper operation. The fan speed should be checked at the same time. Incorrect pulley settings, loose fan belts, or incorrect motor speeds can all contribute to poor performance. Outdoor units should be protected from high winds. High winds may reduce efficiency by causing defrost problems. However, outdoor units should not be placed in restricted areas that will result in recirculation of air over the coil. Regardless of what heating method you use be sure to check it before you need to use it. Have a great wonderful and safe Thanksgiving week. M.V.

November 21-25, 2016.

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