LINCOLN—With almost all of Nebraska under high fire danger, it's important farmers take extra precautions with harvest underway across the state.

Cleaning and maintaining equipment is key as is being prepared in the event a fire does happen, said Paul Jasa, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension engineer.

The first thing farmers should do is to identify and monitor potential hazards on the combine, said Joe Luck, UNL Extension precision agriculture engineer.

This includes:

doing a "dry run" of the combine before entering the field to listen for worn bearings or moving parts and check for any over-heated bearings. Push/pull shafts and sheaves often to check for worn bearings.

Checking wires and wiring harnesses for damaged insulation to prevent an electrical short. If there have been problems with blown fuses, try to find the source of the problem instead of constantly replacing the fuse. Exposed wires could be causing the short and creating sparks which could start a fire.

Never putting in a fuse with higher capacity than those recommended as the wires may overheat and start a fire.

As harvest continues, those outside the combine should listen and watch for potential problems.

If using other equipment (grain cart or rotary mower) in the field during harvest, also keep an eye on it for possible problems.

During harvest it’s important to clean debris from the combine at regular intervals. Be sure to:

Clean any area where chaff or plant material accumulates often, especially those near moving parts

Check areas around the engine, exhaust manifold, fan shrouds, fuel/oil tanks, and chaff spreaders to ensure they are free of debris. Using a leaf blower or compressed air tank is an easy way to remove debris material that builds up on the combine.

Closely monitor any belts that are frayed or worn as they can produce enough heat to start a fire.

Any time you think you smell smoke, stop and examine the combine completely. Chaff and plant materials may smolder for some time before an actual fire starts, sometimes even after the combine has been shut down.

It’s also important to take precautionary measures and be prepared to respond if a fire does occur. This includes:

When harvesting on windy days, if possible, start on the downwind side of the field. This way, in case a fire does occur, at least the wind will carry it away from the standing crop.

Consider carrying a water tank with a pump to the field and always keep a fire extinguisher handy.

Some growers keep a tractor with a tillage implement close by to till a fire break if necessary.

Most recommend keeping at least two fire extinguishers with the combine at harvest—one in the cab and one accessible from ground level. Check your fire extinguishers annually to ensure they are charged properly and always remember proper extinguisher use. Stand a few feet from the fire and aim at the base/source with a sweeping motion.

If a fire does occur, always remember that your personal safety is the most important thing. Don’t put yourself or others in any unnecessary risk. Always call 911 as soon as you notice a fire, then try to put it out.