

Making Ontario's barns fire-safe with technology

With the Haven fire suppression unit fires could be extinguished before anyone even knew they had started

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How can we make our barns a safer place? That's the question that Gary Van Bolderen hears a lot, especially with the number of barn fires receiving media attention lately.

An answer appeared one evening as he walked past the television where an episode of *Dragon's Den* featured the Haven Fire Suppression Safety Device.

He stopped in his tracks: as the president of Dutch Masters Construction in Barrie, a builder of award winning horse barns, he could see the potential application right away.

The Haven fire suppression unit looks like a typical fire extinguisher at first glance but it is fitted with a heat sensor that will activate the unit at 135 degrees F, releasing a stream of non-toxic powder that will douse the fire.

It isn't an alarm, nor is it a smoke detector; it will put out a fire before most people would know one had even started.

A barn owner could come home from a horse show and find a room full of powder dust instead of a burnt-down barn. Clean-up means pulling out a vacuum instead of fixing expensive water damage.

It's a lot faster response to a fire than an alarm system or more typically a person driving by and noticing smoke and flames, without the extra minutes needed to summon help or for firefighters to reach the scene. It's that time that could be the difference

between a small fire and a major tragedy.

Originally designed by a firefighter for residential use with standard height ceilings, each unit will cover a 16-foot area.

For Van Bolderen, as a builder and now a regional agricultural distributor for the Haven, the challenge is to know where to strategically place the unit so that it can become part of a larger fire prevention strategy in barns.

He states that statistics show 43 per cent of residential fires start in the kitchen so he suggests that the logical place to start in the barn is a lounge, lunchroom or viewing area where appliances may be in use.

At his first installation at Valhalla Equestrian, a brand new 55,000 square foot complex near Newmarket, ON, Van Bolderen has placed the Haven units in the mechanical room, laundry room, and in an attached residential kitchen area.

So far he is not convinced that placing the units in a stall area is of value. As he says, "Horses don't start fires; people start fires," preferring to invest in areas with greater ignition potential, such as above electrical panels or appliances.

Each Haven unit retails for \$249.

The Haven has been enthusiastically received by firefighters as well. Jason Benne is the Fire Prevention Officer in Puslinch, the jurisdiction where the tragic fire in January 2016 at Classy Lane Stables claimed the lives of 43 Standardbred racehorses.

While the official cause of that fire has not yet been released, property owners Jamie and Barb Millier have become fire prevention advocates, leading by example.



Gary VanBolderen is the president of Dutch Masters Construction and now a regional distributor for the Haven Fire Suppression Safety Device.

As we toured the new barn at Classy Lane, Benne pointed out the fire prevention considerations that had been implemented, including the installation of six Haven units in the offices, wash-room, mechanical and laundry room, all backed up with heat sensors to the alarm system.

Each room has automatic door closers to compartmentalize any fire.

While he is not able to officially endorse the Haven unit, Benne enthusiastically admits he has bought a few for his own home. His department will be performing test burns to evaluate the Haven unit in select barns in the fall.

The Haven has attracted the attention of the insurance industry as well. Jim Zyta is

the VP of Loss Prevention with Heartland Farm Mutual Insurance. At this time he is eager to include the Haven unit as part of a fire prevention strategy in all agricultural buildings.

Confined livestock barns such as hog, poultry or dairy suffer the biggest fire losses, said Zyta, in both old and new barns.

Electrical issues cause the majority of fires, especially where moisture and ammonia cause corrosion.

"The first room you walk

through when you go in a barn is usually an electrical room," says Zyta. "There is room for a Haven unit in there."

He is currently developing guidelines that will reward farmers for "doing the right thing" in terms of fire prevention and he intends to have a Haven unit at their booth at the Outdoor Farm Show in Woodstock in September.

As Gary Van Bolderen says, "I think it (the Haven) will make Ontario a safer place."



The Valhalla Equestrian Complex near Newmarket.



The Haven Fire Suppression Safety Device unit installed in a ceiling.