By Jan Rahn
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Red flag warnings and excessively high winds last week already had area firemen nervous—then when three fires broke out within a two-day period their anxiety level heightened.

Fortunately for all of the area departments, the fires were extinguished prior to getting fully out of control such as those in the Stapleton area that burned thousands of acres, destroying cropland and homes.

The fires occurring in Perkins County included two on Tuesday, Oct. 4, near Elsie and one on Thursday, Oct. 6 on the Perkins/Chase County line.

Wind was a factor last week with sustained winds of nearly 35 and gusts up to 60 mph on Thursday.

The largest of the two fires Tuesday was started by a baler with a mechanical problem on Willis Hastings' property east of Elsie.

According to Elsie Fire Chief Mitch Cummings, the fire that began late afternoon consumed approximately 170 acres before five area fire departments got it out mid-evening.

It took firefighters approximately four hours to extinguish the blaze fed by high winds that jumped from CRP ground to stubble, into corn, into more stubble and CRP. Firefighters chased flames involving land belonging to Hastings, Greg Pelster, Doug Johnson and Brent Robertson.

"The departments worked really well together," said Cummings. "It was one good unit."

The fire departments that were summoned included Elsie, Madrid, Wallace, Grant and Venango.

Cummings said area farmers contributed to the effort with disks and tractors.

Cummings said firefighters were able to stop the fire before it jumped the road. "If it jumped the road it was heading for a house," said Cummings. "We got lucky there."

Earlier in the day, the Grant, Madrid and Elsie departments were dispatched to a fire southwest of Elsie that was ignited by a cigarette on land belonging to Steve Hanson.

Madrid was first on the scene, but an alert harvesting crew already had the fire out in an area of harvested corn by using tractors and grain carts.

Grant Fire Chief Don Softley complimented the harvest crew and farmers with disks for quick thinking.

"That one sure could have been nasty," he said, .

Softley said it may appear to the general public that it's unnecessary to call in three departments for what turned out to be just a small fire, however, area departments are lacking

in membership and it takes dispatching multiple departments to get enough personnel at the scene.

Area departments were summoned to a third fire on Thursday afternoon of last week at the Perkins/Chase County line between Grant and Madrid.

According to Imperial Fire Chief Bryan Dannatt, an area of cornstalks and the adjacent ditch burned as a result of strong winds blowing leaves and debris into the combine's engine near the exhaust. The leaves ignited, and when the machine turned around, the wind blew the burning leaves into the field causing a fire. Firefighters responded from the departments of Imperial, Lamar, Madrid, Grant and Venango.

The blaze burned fewer than 10 acres, said Dannatt, but because of the intense wind that day, surrounding departments were called. "You just don't know where it's going," he said.

Dannatt said Imperial personnel were on the scene approximately two hours.