



Farm Safety

Approximately 3.2 million men and women work on America's 2.1 million farms and ranches. According to Accident Facts by the National Safety Council, farm accidents and other work-related health problems claim as many as 1400 lives and cause 140,000 injuries a year. Most of these are preventable.

Farmers must handle a variety of agricultural chemicals and other toxic and/or irritating substances. Many materials are hazardous and can be fatal if not used and stored properly, especially with inquisitive youngsters around. Farmers are also exposed to dust, sun, noise, and other farming health hazards.

According to a report published by the National Safety Council in its "Accident Facts", machinery overturns have the highest fatality rate, accounting for 47 percent of all on-the farm fatalities.

Contributing Factors in Farming Accidents

Emergency Preparedness – Hospital and emergency medical care are not usually available within a reasonable distance; the farmer and his family often do not have the ability or time to deal with an emergency before professional help arrives.

Age of workers – Farm surveys indicate that the injury rate is highest among children age 15 and under, and adults more than 65 year's of age.

Protective Equipment – It has been estimated that the use of protective equipment, such as seat belts on tractors, could prevent up to 40% of all farm work injuries.

Equipment and Machinery – The majority of farm accidents and fatalities involve the use of machinery. Proper machine guarding and equipment maintenance in accordance with the manufacturers' recommendation(s) helps in avoiding accidents.

Special Care for Children – Farm accidents claim as many as 300 children's lives per year.

Recommendations for Accident Prevention

The following steps are recommended:

- Make accident prevention a management as well as a personal goal. Develop an awareness of hazards on the farm and make a conscious effort to prepare for emergency situations including fires, vehicle accidents, electrical shocks from equipment and wires, and adverse health effects from chemical exposures.

- Reduce your risk of injury and illness with preventive measures. Read and follow instructions in equipment operator's manuals. Follow instructions on product labels for safe use, handling, and storage.
- Conduct routine inspections of your equipment to determine problems and potential failures that may contribute to or cause an accident.
- Conduct meetings with employees and family members to address safety hazards, discuss potential accident situations, and outline emergency procedures.
- Be especially alert to hazards that may affect children and the elderly.
- Minimize hazards by careful selection of products you buy, by providing good maintenance tools, buildings, and equipment, and establishing good housekeeping procedures.
- Provide rollover protective systems, protective enclosures, or protective frames as appropriate for farm tractors.
- Use seat belts while the tractor is in operation.
- Make sure guards for farm equipment are put back on after maintenance to protect workers from moving machinery parts.
- Review material safety data sheets (MSDS's) and labels that come with chemical products.

Communicate information concerning hazards to all workers. Prevent pesticide poisonings and dermatitis caused by chemicals by ensuring that protective measures recommended in the MSDS's or labels are taken.

- Take the necessary precautions to prevent entrapment and suffocation caused by unstable surfaces of grain storage bins, silos or hoppers.
- Be aware that methane gas, carbon dioxide, ammonia and hydrogen sulfide can be present in unventilated grain silos and manure pits in quantities sufficient to cause asphyxiation or explosion.

Benefits

The benefits of accident prevention include reduced work injury and illness costs such as worker compensation insurance premiums, lost production, and medical costs. A safer, more healthful workplace also improves worker production and morale, and minimizes human suffering.

Summary

OSHA is raising the level of awareness concerning the need for improved farm safety. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Extension Service helps in funding state efforts. The Department of Health and Human Services through its National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is conducting research to determine how best to prevent farm accidents and illnesses. For information on this and other NIOSH topics, call 1-800-356-NIOSH.