



How dangerous is farm work?

Contrary to the popular image of fresh air and peaceful surroundings, a farm is not a hazard-free work setting. Every year, thousands of farm workers are injured and hundreds more die in farming accidents. According to the National Safety Council, agriculture is the most hazardous industry in the nation.

What are health and safety hazards on farms?

Farm workers—including farm families and migrant workers—are exposed to hazards such as the following:

- Chemicals/Pesticides
- Cold
- Dust
- Electricity
- Falls
- Grain bins
- Hand tools
- Highway traffic
- Lifting
- Livestock handling
- Machinery/Equipment
- Manure pits
- Mud
- Noise
- Ponds
- Silos
- Slips/Trips
- Sun/Heat
- Toxic gases
- Tractors
- Wells

What factors are associated with a higher risk of injury and illness on the farm?

The following factors may increase risk for farm workers:

- **Age** – Injury rates are highest among children age 15 and under and adults over 65.
- **Equipment and Machinery** – Most farm accidents and fatalities involve machinery. Proper machine guarding and equipment maintenance according to manufacturers recommendations can help prevent accidents.
- **Protective Equipment** – Using protective equipment, such as seat belts on tractors, and personal protective equipment (such as safety gloves, coveralls, boots, hats, aprons, goggles, face shields) could significantly reduce farming injuries.

- **Medical Care** – Hospitals and emergency medical care are typically not readily accessible in rural areas near farms.

What can I do to improve safety on my farm?

You can start by increasing your awareness of farming hazards and making a conscious effort to prepare for emergency situations including fires, vehicle accidents, electrical shocks from equipment and wires, and chemical exposures. Be especially alert to hazards that may affect children and the elderly. And minimize hazards by carefully selecting products you buy to ensure that you provide good tools and equipment. Always use seat belts when operating tractors, and establish and maintain good housekeeping practices. Here are some other steps you can take to reduce illnesses and injuries on your farm:

- Read and follow instructions in equipment operator's manuals and on product labels.
- Inspect equipment routinely for problems that may cause accidents.
- Discuss safety hazards and emergency procedures with your workers.
- Install approved rollover protective structures, protective enclosures, or protective frames on farm tractors.
- Make sure guards on farm equipment are replaced after maintenance.
- Review and follow instructions in material safety data sheets (MSDSs) and on labels that come with chemical products and communicate information on these hazards to your workers.
- Take precautions to prevent entrapment and suffocation caused by unstable surfaces of grain storage bins, silos, or hoppers. Never "walk the grain."
- Be aware that methane gas, carbon dioxide, ammonia, and hydrogen sulfide can form in unventilated grain silos and manure pits and can suffocate or poison workers or explode.
- Take advantage of safety equipment, such as bypass starter covers, power take-off master shields, and slow-moving vehicle emblems.

What are the benefits of improved safety and health practices?

Better safety and health practices reduce worker fatalities, injuries, and illnesses as well as associated costs such as workers' compensation insurance premiums, lost production, and medical expenses. A safer and more healthful workplace improves morale and productivity.

How can I get more information on safety and health?

For more information about farm safety, visit OSHA at www.osha-slc.gov/SLTC/agriculturaloperations, the National Safety Council at www.nsc.org/farmsafe/facts.htm, the Environmental Protection Agency at <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/safety/workers/workers.htm>, and the Centers for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov/nasd/menu/topic/topic.html. In addition, OSHA has various publications, standards, technical assistance, and compliance tools to help you, and offers extensive assistance through workplace consultation, voluntary protection programs, strategic partnerships, alliances, state plans, grants, training, and education.

OSHA's *Safety and Health Program Management Guidelines* (*Federal Register* 54:3904–3916, January 26, 1989) detail elements critical to the development of a successful safety and health management system. This and other information are available on OSHA's website.

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