



Developing a Safety and Health Program to Reduce Injuries and Accident Losses

A sound safety and health program is an effective way to manage risks, much like an irrigation program or weed control program is to crop production. Accidents are costly. Estimated costs for agriculture-related accidents can range from \$58,000 to \$87,000 per disabling injury. A safety and health program can be simple and should be tailored to your specific operation. Whether you have five, 10, or 100 employees, the information that follows will help you to develop an effective farm or ranch safety and health program.

A safety and health plan needs to include at least these items as part of an accident prevention program. Make these items available to your workers in a location such as the farm shop or display on a bulletin board:

- Safety and health policy statement.
- Workplace safety rules.
- Safety director's name and phone number.
- Record keeping system to report safety and health issues.
- Formal training on safety and health awareness for employees.
- Periodic inspection of work areas.
- Recognition of hazards.
- Inform workers of safety items required by law.
- Plan for emergency preparedness.
- Maps locating emergency equipment and supplies.

Written Safety and Health Policy

A written policy statement is an effective way to communicate a commitment to farm or ranch worker safety and health. The policy statement need not be elaborate; a paragraph or two should be sufficient. This document is also looked upon favorably by insurance companies, regulators, and others should an accident occur. Your safety and health policy should include some of the elements listed below.

- The overall goal of your policy.
- A statement indicating your commitment to making employee safety and health your highest priority.
- Inform employees to follow all safety rules and to report all injuries to their supervisor.

- Request that employees immediately bring all unsafe working conditions or equipment to the attention of the supervisor.
- Inform employees that safety will be reviewed periodically.
- Encourage employees to offer solutions for safety problems or concerns.

The safety and health policy should be posted where employees will see it. Individual policies should be signed by the employee. See the sample Safety Health Policy on the next page.



Sample Safety and Health Policy

_____ (name of farm, ranch, or company) recognizes the value of the individual employee. The safety and health of our employees is our highest priority. We will make every effort to provide safe and healthful working conditions at all times. Employees are required to follow all company safety rules. Unsafe working conditions, unsafe practices, or machines that are unsafe to operate must be reported to supervisors immediately. Employees also must report to their supervisors any injuries that occur at the workplace.

_____ (name of farm, ranch, or company) intends to comply with all safety laws and regulations. Safety issues will be reviewed regularly with our employees.

_____ (name, title) is responsible for having periodic safety meetings, providing safety and health inspections, and making sure that _____ (employee's name) has a healthful and safe working environment. I have read and understand the safety policy.

Employee _____ Date _____ Safety Director/Supervisor _____ Date _____

Workplace Safety Rules

Basic and specialized safety rules need to be developed for all employees. Here are sample rules for a farm or ranch workplace. You may wish to change rules to suit the nature of your operation. Just remember that rules are less likely to be effective if the list is long. They must be simple, easy to understand, and be in a language known to the worker (e.g., Spanish, English, Thai, etc.).

Post your safety rules in highly visible locations to serve as a continuing reminder to employees.

Safety Director

Someone must be responsible for the safety program. It can be the owner, manager, or a reliable supervisor or worker. This person should help establish a budget to ensure that the program not only meets regulatory requirements, but also effectively addresses all the hazards of an operation. Employee responsibilities for safety and health should be reviewed periodically. It is a good idea to post the "responsibilities list" in an area where it can serve as a regular reminder to all workers.

Sample Safety Rules

1. Employees will follow company rules.
2. Only qualified personnel are allowed to operate machinery or equipment.
3. Handle chemicals only if properly instructed, and under the direction of a supervisor.
4. No extra riders are permitted on any motorized equipment.
5. Absolutely no "horseplay" in work areas.
6. Absolutely no use of alcohol or drugs in the work area.
7. Wear all appropriate personal protective equipment (e.g., respirator, gloves, goggles), as instructed by the supervisor.
8. All injuries and property damage accidents must be promptly reported to your supervisor.
9. Ask questions if you do not understand the task you are responsible to perform.
10. Consequences for not following safety rules must be stated. These can range from verbal warnings to suspension to work termination.



Record Keeping System

Records must be kept of all training programs and accidents that have occurred. Have employees sign log sheets indicating the training received and date it. Accidents should be investigated and causes of the accident recorded as well as all circumstances surrounding it. Keep records of hazards identified and if and when they were corrected.

Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for all materials need to be kept in a central location and available to all employees. Also, make sure you have an adequate number of first aid kits and that workers know where to find them.

Training for Employees

Conduct periodic training. Even short programs are effective. Employees should be trained at least quarterly or by season. Maintain records of all training activity. Training should begin with new hires or when responsibilities change. Training may also be required when injuries or "close calls" warrant additional training for employees. It must be timely and thorough.

Use the following guidelines for designing and conducting employee training programs. These should be modified for your particular operation. Remember to tell employees what they are doing right during the training.

General Training Guidelines

1. Verify employee qualifications and experience, particularly in machinery operation. Do not just take their word for it.
2. All new employees should receive proper job instruction and safety training for their particular job responsibilities. List minimum competencies and have employees demonstrate if necessary.
3. All employees should attend a safety training session at least once a year.
4. Short (15 to 30 minutes) weekly training sessions, called "tailgate" meetings, have proven to be effective and can be used to discuss new topics and review safety concerns of the past week.

5. A safety committee can be effective when there is a large number of employees. This committee should include representatives of workers, supervisors, and management.

Training Tips

- Explain how and why you want a job done a particular way.
- Personally demonstrate how to do the job properly and safely.
- Make certain that the employee understands the importance of their job as well as all hazards associated with it.
- Before leaving new workers on their own, make sure that they can perform their job properly and safely. Stay until you are certain they are doing the job correctly.
- Make frequent checks on new workers. Don't "hover" over them. If there are problems with employee performance, repeat the demonstration of correct work procedure. Positive reinforcement is more effective than negative criticism.

**REMEMBER...
GOOD SUPERVISION
IS THE KEY TO SAFETY.
NEVER LEAVE TRAINING
TO CHANCE!**



Inspection of Work Areas

Regular inspection of work areas reduces and often eliminates potential hazards. Assign individuals—safety director or a member of a safety committee—to inspect work areas on a regular basis.

The following items need to be inspected on a daily basis:

- Equipment guards and shields
- Personal protective equipment
- Housekeeping
- Power tools, cords, and extension cords
- Ladders
- Hand tools
- Materials handling equipment

Periodic inspections need to be carried out on the following:

- Fire extinguishers
- First aid and emergency equipment
- Wiring, lighting, and electrical boxes
- Equipment storage and shop arrangement
- Pesticide storage and disposal
- Fuel storage
- Ventilation
- Emergency water supplies

Recognition of Hazards

In addition to regular inspections, employees need to be responsible for maintaining a safe, tidy workplace. Employees should be encouraged to let management know of unsafe or hazardous situations.

Safety Items Required by Law

Safety items should be posted as required by law. Posters are available on Worker Protection Standards and other laws that can be placed in a common area. Also, items such as MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheets) and records of sprayed fields need to be readily available to employees.

Emergency Preparedness and Procedures

Establish emergency procedures for use in case of injury, accident, or other emergency such as fire or severe weather. Post written directions near the phone for getting to the farm or ranch for individuals to give to emergency personnel in the event of an emergency.



Establish a Safety Committee

If your operation involves numerous employees then a safety committee should be established. The committee makeup should include workers and various levels of management. The role of the committee should be to identify potential health and safety problems and bring them to the attention of the employer.

Functions of the safety committee should include:

- 4 Safety inspections
- 4 Hazard control suggestions
- 4 Accident investigation
- 4 Review accident reports
- 4 Safety training
- 4 Field testing and personal protective equipment recommendations
- 4 Safety rules and work procedures
- 4 Safety program evaluation
- 4 Review job procedures
- 4 Recommend improvements

Summary

Base your safety and health program on the safety needs of your operation and your employees. Make your plan simple and practical—one that catches your employees' attention. You need to follow through with the safety plan even when things get hectic.

REMEMBER...
IF SAFETY IS NOT PRACTICED
IT WON'T BE USED.
SAFETY DOES NOT COST;
IT PAYS!

Written by Tom Karsky, University of Idaho. For more information about farm safety, please contact:

Tom Karsky, Extension Farm Safety Specialist, Department of Biological and Agricultural Engineering, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID 83844-0904, phone 208/885-7627, fax 208/885-7908, email (tkarsky@uidaho.edu).

Myron Shenk, Integrated Plant Protection Center, Oregon State University, 2040 Cordley Hall, Corvallis, OR 97331-2915, phone 541/737-6274, fax 541/737-3080, email (shenkm@bcc.orst.edu).

Bill Symons, Extension Safety Specialist, Biological Systems Engineering Department, Washington State University, 204 L. J. Smith Hall, Pullman, WA 99164-6120, phone 509/335-2902, fax 509/335-2722, email (symons@mail.wsu.edu).

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