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Handling Emergency Situations on the Farm¹

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There is always the risk of injury when one works or participates in a farm or equine-related activity. Because of the high risk factor involved it is important to be ready in case of an emergency. Careful planning and training are needed to take control when a situation with injuries does occur. It is advisable that all family members and employees know basic first aid and what to do in case of an emergency. At least one person on the farm should be knowledgeable in advanced first aid and be certified in cardio-pulmonary-resuscitation (CPR). This fact sheet will explain what to do when an emergency does occur and how to handle the problem until professional help arrives.

Because time is of the essence during an emergency situation, emergency phone numbers should be posted by the telephone in large, easy to read lettering. Emergency numbers should include: police, fire department, veterinarian, poison control center and medical doctor. These emergency numbers should be covered with plastic to protect them from dust and water. The emergency number sheet should not be used as a message board, because in time the emergency numbers will become difficult to read. Secondary emergency numbers that should also be posted near the phone may include: farrier, electrical company, plumber, and home and work numbers of all boarders. If you operate a lesson stable, the parents names and home and work phone numbers of all students should be kept on file in case of an injury that occurs during a lesson. Also kept in plastic next to the major emergency phone numbers

should be explicit directions as to where the farm is located from any major roads.

A well stocked first aid kit for people should be supplied on every vehicle and tractor on the farm. Kits should also be available in all major buildings. A first aid kit for horses/livestock should be in all major buildings where stock is present and also in horse and stock trailers. If a place is not available to adequately keep a first aid kit in the trailer, then one should be in the vehicle that is used to tow the trailer. Any time a kit is used, it should be restocked immediately. A Poison First Aid Kit should be kept in areas where pesticides and herbicides are stored and also on any vehicles transporting chemicals. A Red Cross First Aid Manual should also be readily available in a well known central location¹. Commercial first aid kits can be purchased, but you can make your own following American Red Cross guide lines. When making your own kit, use a sturdy, water-proof box with a tight-fitting lid in which to store supplies. Always store first aid kits where they will not become damaged or contaminated by water, dirt or chemicals. Make sure all bottles in the kit are clearly labeled with a water-proof label or marker.

When an emergency situation occurs on the farm, it is important for those on the scene to remain calm and in control. The person or animal injured is depending on those around them for care and support. Farm injuries are common, and all should be taken as serious due to the nature of the occupation or sport in the case of horses. Even minor scrapes and cuts need prompt

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attention because of the high risk of infection from rust, dirt and animal manure. Injuries involving machinery or those received from falls off buildings, ladders or horses are usually the most serious. When an accident does occur, the following steps should be taken:

ASSESSING THE SITUATION AND GETTING EMERGENCY HELP

- Find out what caused the accident, i.e., fall, kick, machinery-related.
- How many persons were involved in the accident?
- Is the person(s) really injured or just unnerved.
- Is the person(s) still in immediate danger, e.g., pinned under or caught in machinery, in a burning or potentially explosive vehicle or building?

AFTER THE ACCIDENT

- In most cases, it is best not to move an accident victim regardless of the injury. If the victim has any pain in the back or neck area, or a lack of feeling or motion in the extremities, there is the possibility of spinal cord injury. *DO NOT* move the victim or allow the victim to try and move themselves. More damage may result.
- If the victim is unconscious, there is a possibility of head injury. Immediate medical care is necessary. Symptoms of a head injury or concussion would include: drowsiness, nausea, vomiting, blurred vision or speech, differently sized pupils, headache, or loss of memory. Skull fractures may be denoted by clear fluid seeping from ears, nose or head, and pain or swelling in the head area.
- For *anyone* who falls (even those who seem to be uninjured) ask them some questions to determine if they are actually coherent and aware of their surroundings. Sample questions could include: 1) name and address; 2) where the person works; 3) what day of the week it is and; 4) what happened before and after the fall.
- For victims with no pulse or who are not breathing, mouth to mouth or CPR should be administered. However, *CPR should only be performed by someone trained and certified in CPR.* Cardiac arrest victims are often the result of drowning; being smothered by grain; overcome by fumes or electrocution. In the case of electrocution do not approach or touch the victim until *ALL* power sources have been shut off; and the police, fire department or power company have ascertained that any downed cables or electrical lines are free of current. If a victim is presumed to have been

overcome by gas fumes, do not enter the area without proper auxiliary breathing apparatus.

For any injury other than a minor cut or bruise, professional emergency help should be sought immediately. If at all possible leave someone with the victim and have a calm, collected person call for help. It is important to give precise information to the emergency service you are calling and be able to give them the answers to the above questions. If a third person is available, they should be sent to wait at the end of the driveway to help direct emergency vehicles to the sight.

WHAT TO DO UNTIL HELP ARRIVES

Stay calm. If you panic, you are no good to the injured person. Keep the victim still and as comfortable as possible until help arrives. Do not give the victim any food or water even if they insist. By using common sense, even the most disastrous situation can have a good outcome.

REFERENCES

1. American Red Cross Standard First Aid. American National Red Cross. 1988.
2. First Aid for Falls. *Equus Magazine*, 149 March 1990.
3. First On the Scene. 1989. Northeast Regional Agricultural Engineering Service. Cornell Cooperative Extension Service. Ithaca, NY.