

Designing for Health and Safety on the Farm



A comprehensive farm health and safety program is well worth the time investment. *Focus on prevention.* Besides the physical hazards, safety on a farm includes how people are treated, how they feel about one another and the work, how conflicts are peacefully resolved, knowing your rights, organizing work so that no one suffers from repetitive motion injuries by working too long at any one activity. Either as a worker or as a manager you need to be aware of physical hazards, know how to assess risks and learn how to plan to minimize dangers so that your farm will be a safe place for workers, visitors and volunteers. New staff members should be trained before they are exposed to any potential hazard. Involve veteran employees in the training of newer employees. Encourage employee feedback and participation in health and safety activities—including periodic internal safety audits. Use an audit checklist. Give special attention to safety of children on the farm; insure the work of older children is supervised.

Health and Safety training can range from informal on-the-go instruction and demonstration, to more formal meetings/presentations, depending on your preference and the size of your operation. Training may be self-guided using reading materials, computer presentations, or video recordings. Topics can be reinforced by posting signs to remind employees, for example, to use hearing protection, to beware of low headroom or a slippery floor surface, etc. Provide periodic (annual) refresher training.

Health and Safety training should address as many of the following as are applicable. Following each topic are common examples of measures to be taken. For additional information and an exhaustive collection of helpful materials see: <https://www.nycamh.org/>.

HEALTH and SAFETY TRAINING CHECKLIST:

Accountability: *have some system for insuring that staff members know each other's whereabouts, and that individuals working at remote locations can be checked on periodically; consider a buddy system and/or establish a means for communicating if appropriate.*

Chemical safety: *train employees to handle commercial products safely; institute practices for avoiding exposure to generated gases such as carbon monoxide, silo gas, sewer gas, and to powders, etc.*

Confined spaces (tanks, silos, wells, pits, etc.): *identify potentially hazardous confined spaces; anticipate hazards such as low oxygen; restrict entry and/or develop safe entry procedures*

Construction, building and equipment maintenance activity: *provide fall protective devices; utilize scaffolds; insure safe excavations: prevent trenching cave-ins, and avoid disturbing buried utilities; maintain welding equipment, limit welding to trained employees, insure adequate ventilation during welding*

Domestic animals: *train employees to handle livestock safely; identify and develop practices for avoiding exposure to zoonotic diseases*

Ergonomics: *prevent lifting injuries: avoid repetitive motions and awkward postures; use lifting and material handling devices to avoid lifting and other musculoskeletal injuries; utilize ergonomically-designed hand tools where feasible*

Electrical safety: *restrict electrical maintenance work to qualified employees, and provide them with protective equipment; observe electrical lockout/tagout procedures; insure that facility electrical installations are code-compliant*

Fire prevention and safety: store flammable/combustible materials safely; promptly dispose of flammable/combustible wastes; provide fire extinguishers maintain clear exits and passage for fire emergencies; prohibit smoking; post fire exit routes; hold periodic evacuation drills.

First Aid: Insure that prompt municipal emergency medical services are available, or have staff members trained in first aid/CPR; provide and maintain a first aid kit; post emergency phone numbers.

Machine and tool safety: safely maintain power tools and hand tools; provide/maintain guards; train employees; observe “lockout/tagout” procedures for heavy machinery maintenance.

Material handling and storage: avoid precarious material handling and storage practices to avoid collapses, contusions, fire propagation, etc.

Motor vehicles and heavy equipment: provide safe operation training for use of tractors, forklifts, cars, harvesters, trucks etc., and restrict vehicle use; keep vehicles in good condition; insure installation of safety devices such as ROPS and PTO shields; restrict riding on the back and rides for children.

Noise: provide and require use of ear muffs/plugs for noisy activities; maintain equipment to minimize noise; reduce noise using barriers, absorbent material, enclosures, etc., where possible.

Personal protective equipment: evaluate your workplace and provide appropriate safety glasses, gloves (thermal, sanitary), face shields, cold/wet weather garments, dust masks, welding helmets, welding gloves, knee pads, sun glasses, etc.

Prevent slips, trips, and falls: keep aisles, doorways, and stairways clear and free of obstructive/slippery materials, post warning signs where necessary/useful.

Respiratory diseases agents: Identify and control exposure to respiratory disease agents: agricultural dusts, molds, animal danders, other allergens.

Sanitation: provide adequate handwashing, toilet, shower facilities; schedule regular cleaning; insure adequate soap, towels, etc.; train employees to observe universal precautions for avoiding exposure to bloodborne pathogens and other diseases; insure that potable water is provided.

Stairways and ladders: Keep stairways clear; insure stairways are code-compliant, with adequate railings, landings, etc.; maintain ladders in good condition; train employees in safe ladder use.

Water safety: identify non-swimmers, provide rescue equipment near ponds, waterways; institute ice-safety steps; restrict access where appropriate

Weather-related hazards: avoid cold and heat stress or excessive UV exposure from the sun, by wearing appropriate clothing and glasses, providing sunscreen, providing adequate breaks and hot/cold fluids

Wildlife: animals, insects, plants: develop precautionary procedures, evaluate employees for allergies, provide immunizations, provide PPP, repellents, topical or other treatments, develop emergency plans

Workplace violence: Anticipate possible incidents of workplace violence in your workplace (irate/disturbed customer, employee, employee spouse, etc.), and pre-plan accordingly.