



Safety Up – On Your New Job

So you have a new job. That's great news! You probably can't wait to get into the field and show your boss what you can do. Whoa – hold up. Before you do, you'd better think about whether you really have the knowledge and experience to get the job done and come back alive.

Farm safety is no accident. It's a skill that involves training and experience, just like driving tractor or branding cattle, and it's important, because the farm is one of the nation's most dangerous workplaces. There are big, mean farming machines, powerful tools, toxic chemicals, confining spaces, drowning hazards, animal threats, power takeoffs, and more. You need proper orientation and training before you get to work. **Know the job. Know the hazard. Know the drill.**

Three steps to safe farming

Think of farm safety as a three-step process that starts when you **know the job**. Knowing the job means getting properly trained ahead of time for each new task you perform. Next, **know the hazard** – learn about the risks associated with each type of task, and then stay alert for them at all times during your workday. Finally, **know the drill** – learn how to safely handle the hazards you spot, either by managing them effectively or avoiding them altogether.

Training – who needs it?

Considering the increased complexity and technological advancements in farm machinery and production processes over the years, it's easy to see why new workers need training. Hundreds of new employees end up injured on the job each year. Most of these injuries happen because of a lack of knowledge! Take responsibility for your own safety. Ensure you know what is expected of you upfront.

Know the job.

As a new worker, it is frustrating and scary to be sent out to do a job without instructions. Don't assume you'll figure it out. Ask questions (and remember, there are no stupid questions). The time and effort you spend learning the job now will pay off in the end. Here are some suggestions to help you get trained effectively:

- Ask your employer to go over all operation and safety points for the machines, tools and equipment you will operate.
- Ask for comprehensive training for complex tasks such as equipment operation.
- Know how to operate machines safely.
- Ask for suggestions about ways to make a task easier.
- Shadow someone more experienced to get a real-life example of what needs doing. Ask questions. What gear should you wear? What hazards will you need to avoid?
- Once training is complete, it's time to get to work – make sure you fully understand the job and follow all safety precautions while doing it.

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Farmyard hazard primer

You'll likely be required to do many different tasks on the farm on a given day. Take time to get to **know the hazards** of each job before you start. When you're on the job, demonstrate that you can be responsible and accountable. Accept personal responsibility for your work.

Before you get started, consider these safety tips:

- Check the user's manual and understand all warning decals on equipment you'll operate.
- Read all chemical labels to determine appropriate safety gear and handling requirements.
- Ask how to deal with known hazards upfront – such as the hazards of working with livestock, tractors, farm implements, and other equipment.
- Consider the risks of exposure to dust, noise, chemicals, animals and toxic materials, and prepare ahead of time to prevent related incidents or injuries.
- Keep safety top-of-mind while you work.
- Don't take shortcuts. Shortcuts are the surest way to end up injured – or worse.

Reality face-off

An important way to manage risk is to plan ahead for the worst-case scenario. Ask yourself what if?

- What if I get hurt and can't work?
- Will I get paid?
- Does my employer carry insurance or do I need my own?

There's a lot to know, and a lot to know how to avoid. Take responsibility for your safety and your future.

Cover your . . .

Toxic chemicals, dust, gas, aggressive animals, infectious diseases, pinch points, crush points and pull-in points... When you consider all the painful hazards on the farm, safety gear starts to look like an obvious fashion choice. Just like wearing a helmet and jock strap in hockey makes sense, it also makes sense to wear protective gear that will keep you safe from hazards on the job. If you're going to play the game, cover yourself – with the right gear.

- Wear proper workboots at all times.
- Wear a helmet to avoid head injury while doing construction, felling or trimming trees, using ATVs or motorbikes, or riding horses.
- Wear goggles or safety glasses when handling chemicals, using power tools, spray-painting, applying fertilizers or doing dusty jobs, along with appropriate respiratory protection, gloves and coveralls, depending on the job.
- Wear a full face visor for jobs like welding or using a grinder.
- Protect your hearing when the noise level goes up – if you have to raise your voice to be heard by someone three feet away, you need protection.
- Don't get burned – repeated sun exposure dramatically increases your risk of developing skin cancer. Cover skin or use sunscreen, and wear a wide-brimmed hat to protect head, neck, face and ears.

Know the drill

When you understand how to do the job safely and can recognize hazards on the go, you need to learn to apply your knowledge to prevent incidents, avoid injuries, and ensure everything runs smoothly. **Know the drill.**

- Select a hazard-free, well-fitted wardrobe – baggy clothing, hoodie strings, jewellery and loose hair can get caught in machinery.
- Take the time to put on personal protective equipment (PPE) suitable for the job before you start.
- Learn proper lifting techniques and ensure you remember to use them.
- Report unsafe conditions and equipment. Your timely reaction can save the farm money and reduce the potential for injuries.
- Take regular breaks or rotate work that is monotonous, boring or disagreeable.
- Know how you will handle an emergency situation: learn the location of telephones, emergency numbers and fire extinguishers. Know how to contact emergency services and what contingency plans should be followed.
- Take first aid training. If you don't have it, find out who on the farm does so you can get the right help in an emergency.
- Learn how to use a fire extinguisher. A small fire extinguisher could be the difference between a minor brush fire and losing the farm.

The last word

Farm work can be very challenging and very rewarding. Ensure you can enjoy your new job for a long time to come. Start with proper training and learn to manage hazards as you go. Take personal responsibility for your health and well-being at work. You'll enjoy it more, be more productive, and stay safer on the job.

References

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