



**Fact Sheet**  
NO. F-018  
MARCH 1988

**Farm Safety Association**

## **On the Farm, Safety of Children is Adult's Responsibility**

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*"Even good-tempered animals can be dangerous. This kind of situation can lead to injury".*

The statistics are frightening! In just 10 years, 80 children under the age of 15 were killed in Ontario farm accidents. Among these fatalities were 61 youngsters aged 10 years or less. Thirty-nine were under the age of five. In every case, a very young life was cut short, and a family was left with a gap that can never be filled.

### **Inherent dangers**

The very nature of farming activities is what makes them so dangerous to children. On the one hand, a farm is an industrial workplace, filled with a bewildering variety of dangers. Yet it is also a home, or a special place to visit. Children can not simply be kept completely away from the workplace, as is the case in other industries. Instead, farm families must identify the many hazards and find ways of dealing with them.

### **The major hazards**

Hazards encountered on a farm are extremely varied. They range from electric shock, to poisoning, to bad-tempered livestock. The hazards also change--for example, a stubble field may be a good, safe place for a walk. A few days earlier--

during harvesting--the same field would have been filled with danger.

### **Machinery**

Most children killed or injured on farms are victims of machinery accidents.

Many of these tragedies occur when an operator starts a machine without even knowing a child is in the area. In other cases, the neglect is more obvious--for example, when a child falls from an implement or a tractor fender.

### **Hazardous materials**

A majority of farm chemicals are quite dangerous. If children (especially small children) get their hands on such materials, the results can be quite tragic. The same is true with more commonplace items, such as gasoline and matches.

### **Building and other structures**

Buildings can be designed to be safe, and should be fixed if they are unsafe. However, sloppiness can defeat the safest design. For example, a farm child died when he tried climbing a tractor wheel that was leaning against a wall, and the wheel fell on him. Another youngster died when some old baler twine hanging from a beam caught around his neck.

### **Livestock**

Even good-tempered animals can become dangerous. For example, a toddler could be knocked down and trampled by cattle that would hardly notice the child's presence. Even the quietest animals can become dangerous if they feel threatened, particularly if they have their young with them.



*"Know where children are at all times. Young children **must** be supervised".*

## **Protecting children: The basics**

Accidents involving children *can* be prevented through attention to details, based on a good understanding of some of the fundamental principles:

### **Make equipment and buildings safe**

Anything that is hazardous to you--for example, a hole in a barn floor or a protective shield left off a machine--is also a danger to children. However, simply making a farm safe for adults is not enough. Children are extremely curious, but lack adult judgement. They also may be small enough to get past protective barriers and shields that would stop most grown-ups.

### **Dangerous equipment, materials should be inaccessible**

Anything children might use to harm themselves or others should always be kept out of reach. Guns and pesticides are obvious examples.

### **Know where children are at all times**

This is difficult on a modern farm, since both parents often have to join in the work. However, young children *must* be supervised. If both parents are working, daycare or some other form of adult supervision is essential.

### **Practice safety**

Have you ever set down a container of pesticide for "just a second," and ended up leaving it for several hours? The best planning and intentions only pay off if safety is practiced every day.

## **Set a good example**

When children start to help out on the farm, they will follow your example. If you work safely, so will they.

## **Educate**

Even small children can learn the rudiments of safety, such as which areas of the farm are "off limits." As they get older, children can learn why certain things are dangerous. School programs and safety publications designed specifically for children enhance the learning process.

## **Don't ask too much**

When youngsters do begin helping with farm work, proper training is essential. Adults should keep in mind a child's limited strength and experience. (How often will a teenager actually admit that they "don't know" or "aren't strong enough?")

It is especially easy to assume that the safe way of doing something is obvious. Instead, it is only because of the farmer's wealth of experience that it *seems* obvious. For the youngster, *everything* about safety has to be explained, and then explained again.

## **Anticipate lapses**

Even the best kids can disobey or forget. Similarly, well supervised children will occasionally end up where they don't belong. Taking children for granted--for example, leaving a can of pesticide out because you assume that a youngster "knows better"--can be extremely dangerous.



*"Anything that is hazardous to you--is also a danger to children. Remove hazards where possible".*

## Safe machinery operation saves lives

The most important safety rule on the farm is **NO PASSENGER--EVER!**

An Ontario study showed that 13 child fatalities were passengers on tractors or on implements connected to tractors. The great tragedy is that these accidents could so easily have been prevented.

You have to be firm! Refuse to give in to requests for a ride "just across the barnyard." Allow enough time for helpers to walk to and from fields, or provide a safe means of transport.

Machinery should be maintained in good repair, with all protective shields in place. Children must understand that they are not allowed to play with idle machinery. Equipment that might fall--such as front-end loaders--should be left in the down position. When self-propelled machinery is parked, brakes should be locked and keys removed from the ignition. Tractor PTO's should always be left in neutral. When starting machinery--and especially when reversing--you should always know where the children are.

Kids should not be allowed to operate machinery until they are big enough to easily reach *all* of the controls. They should be thoroughly trained in the safe operation of equipment before start-up. When training beginners, have them explain things back to you, using their own words. If they seem confused, take the time to go over things again and again, until you are sure they understand. Something that seems obvious to you may be very confusing to a beginner.

### **MAKE WORK AREAS 'OFF LIMITS'**

Until they are old enough to begin helping, children should not be allowed in areas where work is underway. An operator simply can not operate a machine properly and watch for children at the same time. This is true for fieldwork, as well as for work around buildings.



*"Children must understand that they are **not** allowed to play with idle machinery".*



*"Make hazardous areas such as manure pits inaccessible to children by fencing them".*

Exceptions can be made to show children the type of work being done. However, they should be kept in a group, and should always be accompanied by an adult. It should be emphasised that they are there to watch, not to play or run around. The accompanying adult should be careful to keep the children a safe distance away from any danger.

### **Safety can be built into structures**

Some farm structures are extremely hazardous to children. The most dangerous of these include:

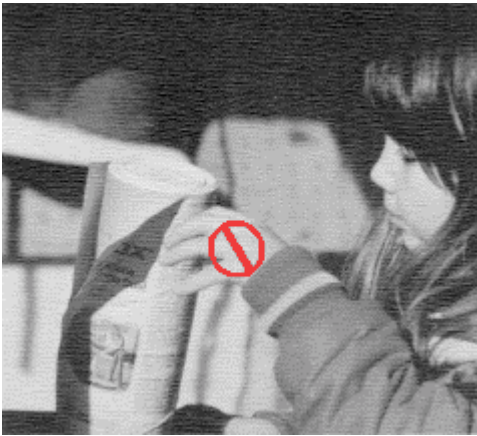
- **Silos**, with their deadly gases and unloading equipment.
- **Binned grain** can turn into quicksand, particularly during bottom unloading. (Children have also 'drowned' in grain as bins were being filled.)
- **Farm ponds and open liquid manure storage facilities** are potential drowning sites.
- **Stationary machinery**, such as feed mills.
- **Electrical boxes and wiring.**

- **Anywhere high enough to produce a dangerous fall.**

The only way to make any of these areas safe for children is to make them inaccessible. In some cases, this requires special fencing--for example, around manure pits. The fencing should be designed to prevent children squeezing through or climbing over.

The bottoms of fixed ladders should be out of reach, or fitted with a special barrier. Portable ladders should be stored away from danger areas such as silos.

Where protective barriers are needed, they should be fitted properly and designed so that small children cannot squeeze through. Dangerous machinery components and electrical boxes and wiring should be properly shielded. They should be placed out of the reach of small children, or be fitted with locking devices.



*"Dangerous materials such as pesticides should be stored in a locked cabinet or shed".*

## NEATNESS COUNTS

Safe designs have to be supported by safe habits. Many children have been injured by simply tripping over objects left lying on the ground. Others have been hurt when they became tangled in old fence wire or baler twine. Anything you want to keep should be stored neatly; everything else should go to the dump. This rule applies not just to the farmyard, but also to fencerows and fields.

When storing things, be careful not to create new hazards. For example, a couple of bales of straw stored under a fusebox can put the box within a

toddler's reach. Also, heavy objects should never be left leaning against walls or posts. Children will try to climb them and may fall or even pull the objects over on top of themselves.

## PROVIDE SAFE STORAGE

Dangerous materials, such as pesticides and other toxic chemicals, should be stored in a locked cabinet or shed in their original containers. When a container is empty, it should be rinsed out and disposed of as soon as possible. If there is not enough room to securely store treated seed and fertilizer, children should be warned of the dangers in the strongest possible terms. In identifying hazardous materials, be careful not to overlook everyday items, such as matches.

Guns should be stored *unloaded* in a place where they are out of children's reach. Ammunition should be stored in a separate place that can be locked. When in use, guns should never be left unattended, even for "just a second."

## SUPERVISION NEEDED AT ALL AGES

As children mature, there are changes in the nature of supervision that are required. In the early years, children simply can not be left alone. If both parents are working, someone else--a babysitter, a relative, or a rural day care service--*must* be found. At this age, a fenced play area near the house will make supervision easier. However, an adult should still be close at hand.

As children get older, the need for direct supervision decreases. However, basic rules--for example, to stay away from areas where work is underway--are still needed. Adults must be patient and allow enough time to enforce the rules.

When older children begin helping on the farm, a different kind of supervision is needed. The days of simply making areas off limits are gone. Instead, parents must watch to make sure work is being done safely. Whenever safety rules are broken, adults

must make time for explanation and enforcement.

## **It's in your hands**

Remember that children sometimes are careless, and may forget. They may try to do too much, and

sometimes deliberately disobey. In the end, safety is the responsibility of adults. No matter how carefully they are taught, children *are* still children.

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